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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SANDFORD FLEMING AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PACIFIC CABLE

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Sandford Fleming and the Establishment of a Pacific Cable" submitted by David R. Richeson in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.





## ABSTRACT

The conception of a submarine telegraph cable across the Pacific from the west coast of Canada originated in 1879 as an outgrowth, of Canadian transcontinental expansion. The telegraph had proved to be the most useful innovation in communications in the nineteenth century. Successful Canadian application of telegraphy led Sandford Fleming to propose a Pacific cable as a logical extension of the Canadian telegraph system.

The Pacific cable became the first instance of cooperation and equal participation in an enterprise by Canada, New Zealand and Australia, which was also supported by Great Britain, to further commercial, political and social relations. The completion of the cable in 1902 after over twenty years of nearly continual agitation resulted in one of the most important accomplishments of imperial sentiment, led by men whose motivation was progress through applied technology. Communication was seen as a key to imperial unity and strength. Thus the Pacific cable demonstrated a positive aspect of imperialism that resulted in a lasting achievement.

Imperial sentiment in 1887 brought about a colonial conference called by Britain to obtain colonial opinion on a





variety of subjects, including the improvement of inter-colonial communications. The conference, at which Fleming was a Canadian delegate, resolved in favour of a Pacific cable. The conference increased colonial awareness of common problems--including the intense opposition of the monopolistic Eastern Extension Telegraph Company.

Strong opposition to a Pacific cable forced Sandford Fleming to conclude that only a government-owned and operated Pacific cable could truly serve the public interest and lead to lower cable rates throughout the Empire. His advocacy of this scheme, supported at various times by organizations and individuals in Canada, Britain and the Empire, continued into the 1890's with no definite result.

Canada took the initiative in 1894 by calling a colonial conference in Ottawa. Strong support for a cable was evidenced at the conference and all technical objections were removed. Political changes in Canada and Australia, as well as American expansion in the Pacific, all delayed progress of the scheme. A committee assembled by Joseph Chamberlain in 1896 provided further support for the idea of a Pacific cable, but little progress resulted.

The Laurier government energetically pushed the project in 1899 to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation on non-divisive Imperial matters, to increase Canadian commercial possibilities in Australia, and to show the United States that Canada was prepared to compete in the Pacific. Public





opinion, carefully encouraged by Fleming and others, supported the efforts of the Laurier government to overcome opposition to the cable. Chamberlain, who personally favoured the cable, used the strong colonial protests to override the internal opposition in Britain and commit the government to sharing in the ownership and operation of the Pacific cable. The all-British Pacific cable, which contained the longest single span of cable ever laid, came into operation in November 1902, creating a communication link of major importance to the Empire.



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I wish to thank the many individuals at the National Archives in Ottawa, the Ontario Provincial Archives, the Archives of British Columbia, and the University of Alberta Library for their assistance in the preparation of this dissertation.

Finally, I must mention with appreciation the encouragement of Professor Norman Penlington who expressed so well to me a rationale for studying the men, manners and machines of the Victorian era: "It is about time historians took the





Imperialists seriously instead of the kind of sneer that is so common when they are taken out of context and pilloried on the exaggerations of their rhetoric."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Professor Norman Penlington, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 21 June 1969.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE TELEGRAPH CABLE--A BOND OF EMPIRE

The telegraph and the undersea cable were significant adaptations of one of the major technological advances of the nineteenth century--the application of electric power to communication. Great Britain led the world in the manufacture and application of these devices in communication. The seas of the world, which both defended and isolated much of Britain's Empire, were instantly removed as obstacles to swift communication. Time required for communication for economic, political, military, or social purposes was reduced from weeks or even months in some instances to a matter of minutes, with resulting revolutionary impact.

This new ease of communication was of greatest importance to the British colonies, especially the most isolated colonies of Australia and New Zealand. The importance of telegraphy was also quite apparent to those capitalists who provided the earliest electric communication to Australia--the charges for these services were exorbitantly high, and the prospects of profit were highly favourable. The British colonies in North America were among the first colonies to develop a telegraph system and were involved in the earliest efforts to span the Atlantic Ocean



by undersea cable. The success of an Atlantic cable in 1866 resulted in still greater extension of internal telegraph lines.

By Confederation Canada possessed over 3,000 miles of telegraph line, and some men had already begun to plan toward direct contact with the Pacific coast in British North America. Others, like Sandford Fleming, had a vision beyond the Pacific coast: a conception of an undersea cable across the Pacific Ocean from North America. Fleming was not alone in the vision, but he proved to be its most persistent advocate. His efforts to promote this project provide a vivid example of a particular kind of Canadian imperialist, interested not in theoretical, economic, or political conceptions of Empire but devoted to creating physical bonds of Empire by utilizing the most recent technological innovations. Fleming hoped these bonds would aid in forming a sense of kinship among the sections of the British Empire which had developed from the migration of Britons overseas. These bonds would also facilitate the aims of those seeking to promote other types of imperial unity. The Pacific cable project, to which Fleming devoted a significant part of his life, demonstrates one such physical bond--"a motive nerve of Empire" as Fleming described it. An examination of the methods used at various times to promote the project, the opposition which rose against it, and the extent to which the imperial, Dominion, and colonial governments came to be involved illustrates the concept of imperialism from a new





perspective. Experiences and ideas formed and tested while Canada was being forged into a trans-continental entity were adapted by Fleming and other Canadians interested in technology in an attempt to unify the isolated sections of the British Empire.

Few studies exist that deal with the impact of the telegraph and the undersea cable on the nineteenth century. Those few Canadian authors who discuss the subject on a theoretical plane tend to draw pessimistic conclusions, in sharp contrast to the mood of extreme optimism with which such innovations were greeted in the Victorian era. The application of electric power to communication appeared to those men concerned with technological development to be one further example of the successful domination of nature by man. No doubts clouded the Victorian mind concerning the unqualified progress such innovations introduced to the world.

Marshall McLuhan credits H. A. Innis with applying communication technology to the study of history but cites his failure to fully appreciate the true importance of electric technology:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See: Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communication* (Oxford: 1950); and H. A. Innis, "A History of Communications" (An incomplete and unrevised manuscript, 1952, Public Archives of Canada, M292).



"It had not occurred to Innis that electricity is in effect an extension of the nervous system as a kind of global membrane."<sup>1</sup> Yet this same idea was commonly used by Sandford Fleming in the 1890's to describe the unifying effect which the Pacific cable and extensions of its type would have upon the British Empire.

However, McLuhan, like Innis, ultimately arrived at a negative conclusion regarding the introduction of electric communication:

. . . with the telegraph, man had initiated that outerring or extension of his central nervous system that is now approaching an extension of consciousness . . . To put one's nerves outside, and one's physical organs inside the nervous system, or the brain, is to initiate a situation--if not a concept--of dread.

. . . it [the telegraph] ushers in the Age of Anxiety and of Pervasive Dread . . . .<sup>2</sup>

A large part of this "anxiety" is attributed to the increased speed assumed by all facets of life with the advent of the telegraph. McLuhan stated:

Acceleration is a formula for dissolution and breakdown in any organization. Since the entire mechanical technology of the Western world has been wedded to electricity, it has pushed toward higher speeds.<sup>3</sup>

Victorian Canadians saw no dangers in increased speed of communication. The only feelings of anxiety and of pervasive

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall McLuhan, "Introduction," in H. A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: 1968), p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: 1964), p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.





dread directed toward the Pacific cable and other projects of its type were held by those capitalists possessing a monopoly of communication facilities who stood to see their position undermined.

The motives which drove men toward ". . . progress through technological advance . . ." have been analyzed by George Grant, grandson of George Munro Grant, a prominent Victorian Canadian intellectual. George Grant has written that the belief was and is widely held ". . . that questions of human good are to be solved by technology . . ." <sup>1</sup> This can explain the intense dedication of individuals such as Sandford Fleming to a scheme such as the Pacific Cable Project. Grant concludes that, "What makes the drive to technology so strong is that it is carried on by men who . . . identify what they are doing with the liberation of mankind." <sup>2</sup>

In examining the connection between motives for the promotion of technology and the eventual results of this action, Grant drew the logical conclusion that there was an ". . . inevitable relation between dynamic technology and imperialism." <sup>3</sup> His final judgement of "technological imperialism" and of those who accepted it, is harsh:

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<sup>1</sup>George Grant, *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: 1969), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.



It is well to remember that large sections of our population resisted the call to imperialism by the economic and political powers, . . . even when they welcomed the technological expansion which made it possible.<sup>1</sup>

Somewhat wistfully, the conservative Grant concluded:

A central aspect of the fate of being Canadian is that our very existing has at all times been bound up with the interplay of various world empires.<sup>2</sup>

What Grant<sup>3</sup> seems unwilling to admit is that there were numerous Canadians such as Sandford Fleming, George Munro Grant, and others who never considered that they were "bound up," but rather felt they were participating as equals in the promotion and expansion of technological innovations, especially in communication.

Outside the theoretical realm, historical interpretation of Canadian imperialism and communication technology has emphasized somewhat lighter hues and more positive factors. The advent of the electric age for the first time made possible the division of techniques of communication from techniques of transportation, a system which in Canada had been based upon use of waterways and had served well until the mid-nineteenth century. The development of the telegraph and the railway for the first time allowed ideas and men to travel separately with increasing speed. John Irving claims

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> For two recent comments on Grant and his ideas see: Ramsey Cook, "Loyalism, technology and Canada's fate," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V, no. 3 (August, 1970), 50-60; and W. L. Morton, "Conservatism and technology," *Ibid.*, V, no. 1 (February, 1970), 3-14.



that post-Confederation Canadian society was, ". . . essentially the product of the railway and the telegraph as techniques of transportation and communication."<sup>1</sup> Without the telegraph Canada would have remained a collection of small isolated communities. Sandford Fleming and others were aware of the importance of communication in the Canadian experience. On the basis of such experience they sought unification of isolated British Empire communities through improved communication.

The contribution of communications to the success of Canadian unification has served from time to time as a theme for Canadian historians. Colonel C. P. Stacey has referred to communications as the "backbone of Canada"; he wrote ". . . in Canada more than in most countries the history of the building of the state is the history of the development of communications."<sup>2</sup> According to Stacey the importance of the Canadian achievement lies in the attitudes of the men who had the necessary vision and determination to carry out the plans:

Edmund Burke, in his most famous speech, spoke of ties which, though light as air, are strong as links of iron. The moral and sentimental bonds that Burke understood so well are the things that unite nations and empires, and in British history they have often confounded the "sophisters, economists and calculators" to

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Irving, ed., *Mass Media in Canada* (Toronto: 1969), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Colonel C. P. Stacey, "The Backbone of Canada," *Canadian Historical Association, Annual Report* (1953), p. 1 (hereinafter cited *C.H.A. Report*).





whom he paid his respects in another celebrated passage. Nevertheless, in proper circumstances there is a great deal to be said for links of iron. It was faith and courage that created the Canadian nation; it was steel rails, stretching nearly 4,000 miles across a continent, that gave the nation bone and substance. Yet those rails themselves were only the product of human faith and courage of long aspiration and patient perseverance.<sup>1</sup>

Telegraphs and their extensions--undersea cables--were of the same substance and were brought forth by the same idealism.

The extension of communication facilities opened a wider horizon for Canadian involvement in the world, a theme stressed by Margaret Ormsby:

National expansion along latitudinal lines emphasized Canada's subservience to the industrialization of Great Britain and strengthened the imperial tie. But it also revived the age-old dream of trade being opened with Cathay. The steamship and the trans-oceanic cable were natural allies of the railway, and these could be used to extend the horizontal lines across the seas to other continents, and in the process of increasing national prosperity establish contact for the Canadian community with intellectual movements in older societies.<sup>2</sup>

Canada as a continental nation evoked dreams of a Pacific Ocean dominated, or at least exploited, by Canadians.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Ormsby, "Presidential Address," *C.H.A. Report* (1966), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>The efforts to discover or forge routes that could be utilized to exploit the possibilities for commerce in the Pacific are well described by Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, 2nd. rev. ed. (New York: 1964). Of special interest is Stefansson's treatment of communications facilities which provided the most successful access to the countries bordering on the Pacific Ocean.



Sir Charles Tupper chose to stress such sentiments by recalling in his *Recollections of Sixty Years* one of his most notable speeches in the Canadian House of Commons in which he declared:

With such a territory as this to overrun, organize and improve, think you that we shall stop even at the western bounds of Canada? Or even at the shore of the Pacific? Vancouver Island, with its vast coal measures, lies beyond. The beautiful islands of the Pacific and the growing commerce of the ocean are beyond. Populous China and the rich East are beyond; and the sails of our children's children will reflect as familiarly the sunbeams of the south as they now brave the angry tempests of the north.<sup>1</sup>

The Canadians after Confederation who possessed these and other similar dreams of expansion had what Carl Berger termed "the sense of power."<sup>2</sup> Certainly John A. Macdonald was such a man with a vision, but there were many others.<sup>3</sup> George M. Grant, George Parkin, and Sandford Fleming were prominent in different fields in Victorian Canada; each stressed a particular aspect of imperialism--an expression of an expansive Canadian spirit. Carl Berger has been most successful in attempting to describe Canadian imperialism:

Imperialism was a sentiment and an outlook before it became a policy. Individuals were disposed to accept the values and perspectives it embodied because these appeared meaningful in terms of their own experiences

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Charles Tupper, *Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada* (London: 1914), pp. 333-34.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in The Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: 1970), p. 259 (hereinafter cited as *Sense of Power*).

<sup>3</sup>For illustrations of Macdonald's views see: Ormsby, *C.H.A. Report* (1966), p. 9; and Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: 1955), p. 459 (hereinafter cited as *Old Chieftain*).



and convictions. Different men chose to emphasize certain elements of that concept over others with the result that it exhibited a bewildering variety of meanings.<sup>1</sup>

For Sandford Fleming, in particular, ". . . out of whose mind came so many proposals for strengthening the Empire through improved communications, . . ." <sup>2</sup> the physical difficulties of Canadian geography, Canada's size, abundance and opportunities were the basis of his experience. These characteristics--an interest in geography and an understanding of the importance of communications--both necessities in Canada, were two of several commonly possessed by all Canadian imperialists of the late Victorian period.<sup>3</sup>

A common conception of history and of progress was held by such men as Fleming. They shared a conception of history which, ". . . was rooted in the belief in progress, in the conviction that history was the record of steady improvement in material conditions and in intellectual and moral life."<sup>4</sup> This progress could be easily observed on every side in the technological innovations altering almost every aspect of Victorian Canadian life. Sandford Fleming summarized this attitude quite well in 1892 when he observed that: "Within the present century, scientific methods have made conquests over traditional methods in nearly every

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<sup>1</sup>Berger, *Sense of Power*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.





sphere of life."<sup>1</sup> For men like Fleming improved communications and other tangible products of the Empire were instruments and servants of imperialism, rather than its substance.<sup>2</sup>

Sandford Fleming<sup>3</sup> had years of direct experience in the Canadian application of technology, serving as Engineer-In-Chief of the Intercolonial Railway and later in the same capacity on the Canadian Pacific Railway. In the 1880's, when Fleming was advocating Canadian involvement in a cable project linking the British colonies with Pacific borders, he described both the Canadian Intercolonial Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway as important links in the chain of imperial communication: "I trust it will be found that while serving the Canadian Government to the best of my ability I have never lost sight of Imperial interests."<sup>4</sup> However, these links he felt had only been the earliest phase of a system combined with improved post, telegraph, and cable services which would greatly aid in the promotion of British

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<sup>1</sup>Sandford Fleming, *An Appeal to the Canadian Institute on the Rectification of Parliament* (Toronto: 1892), p.131; cited in Berger, *Sense of Power*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>Berger, *Sense of Power*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup>Sandford Fleming was perhaps the most prominent Canadian engineer of the Confederation Period in Canada. He was active in the cultural and economic life of Canada throughout his lifetime, although he never participated directly in the political life of the country.

<sup>4</sup>Sir Sandford Fleming Papers, vol. 22, no. 156, Fleming to R. W. Herbert (C.O.), 13 December 1876, (hereinafter cited as Fleming Papers).



Empire solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

Late in his life Sandford Fleming justified his years of work on improved imperial communication and on the Pacific cable project specifically on the basis that the Pacific cable was,

. . . an indispensable adjunct to Imperial unity and  
. . . I felt unable to advance the cause of British unity better in any other way than by directing what powers I had to the development of a physical junction by telegraph wire of various parts of the widely severed Empire.<sup>2</sup>

These government-supported "motive nerves" of a potentially federated British Empire, certainly a stage in the evolution of the Commonwealth, were prompted by individuals, of whom Sandford Fleming was the most important Canadian example, working alone as well as with interested groups and organizations throughout the British Empire in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. The virtual crusade waged on behalf of a British Pacific cable, and on behalf of improved imperial communication facilities, by Fleming and others came to be mainly a process of educating the public to the advantages which could be derived by applying technological developments to communications. Fleming admitted that to accomplish the task public opinion had been ". . . moulded if not revolutionized."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Fleming Papers*, vol. 87, Notebook, n.d.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 99, no. 21, Fleming to the Editor of Edward Stanford Publishers (London), n.d.; Edward Stanford published *The All Red Line: The Annals and Aims of The Pacific Cable Project*, George Johnson, ed., (London: 1903).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



Sandford Fleming once said of the Pacific cable, "It is the . . . offspring of the Victorian Age."<sup>1</sup> The Pacific cable was a physical "link of iron" forged to strengthen the British Empire. It was the result of applied technology, brought about largely by a Canadian imbued with a conviction that progress was inherent in technological advancement, that was directed toward a goal of strengthened imperial unity. The Pacific cable project was a manifestation of one particular aspect of late nineteenth century Canadian imperialism. Fleming gained his experience and formed his convictions about the value of communications in establishment of closer ties as a result of his many activities related to the development of Canadian communication and transportation facilities. After many years of false starts and disappointed hopes, Fleming learned the secret of moulding and guiding public opinion toward a goal considered worthwhile--the improvement of the British Empire. The Pacific cable emerged as one of the few definite accomplishments of practical Victorian men with a vision and a "sense of power."

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*





## CHAPTER II

### THE CANADIAN TELEGRAPH SYSTEM

The British colonies in North America were among the first areas to appreciate the value of the telegraph for transmission of news, commercial business, and for purposes of governmental administration. The telegraph system developed at first independently and then in conjunction with the growth of railways in British North America. By the time of Confederation Canada possessed over 3,000 miles of telegraph line, and some men had already projected plans for direct contact with the Pacific coast in British Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Victoria's reign had begun in Great Britain as William Cooke and Charles Wheatstone in 1839 constructed the first telegraph line in connection with the Great Western Railway. This telegraph soon proved its worth; 500 miles of telegraph line had been constructed in Britain by 1845. Throughout Europe the telegraph spread in connection with railways, although in Britain companies not connected with railways had begun to operate as early as 1846. Cooke and

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<sup>1</sup>Specific incidents in the history of telegraphy in British North America have occasionally been developed in articles but a convenient overview is lacking. As examples of such an overview one can cite John Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph* (Montreal: 1905); J. J. Brown, *Ideas in Exile: A History of Canadian Invention* (Toronto: 1967).



Wheatstone received knighthoods from Queen Victoria as reward for their services to Britain, which soon led the world in the manufacture and application of telegraphic equipment.

In North America during the same period Samuel B. Morse and Alfred Vail developed an electric telegraph based upon principles which in time would prove more practical than the British telegraph. However, the Morse telegraph was not put into practice until 1845 after several discouraging years of work. A grant from the United States government made the earliest work possible, but the government relinquished its control of the Baltimore to Washington line in 1847. Expansion in the United States was relatively slow for nearly twenty years until Hiram Sibley combined many small companies into the large Western Union Telegraph Company in the 1860's.<sup>1</sup>

In the Province of Canada the first telegraph message was transmitted on December 19, 1846, by the Mayor of Toronto to the Mayor of Hamilton. This message traveled over the first section of the lines of the Toronto, Hamilton, and St. Catharines Electro-magnetic Telegraph Company, incorporated to connect with American telegraph lines at

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<sup>1</sup>An extensive literature exists on the early developments in the field of telegraphy. A good general summary for the historian interested in technology is provided in E. A. Marland, *Early Electrical Communication* (London: 1964) and G. R. M. Garratt, "Telegraphy," *A History of Technology*, ed., C. Singer *et al.* (Oxford: 1958).



Buffalo, New York. This first telegraph in British North America was 89 miles in length and initially carried only 10 to 12 messages each day. These events took place at a time when the Province of Canada possessed a mere 16 miles of railway.

The success of the first Canadian telegraph company prompted a larger scale enterprise in 1847--the Montreal Telegraph Company. This new company built a line from Toronto to Quebec and by the end of its first year of operation had transmitted over 33,000 messages. Sir Hugh Allen, a wealthy Montreal shipowner, became president of the Montreal Telegraph Company in 1851. During the next 30 years the Company aggressively expanded its lines and took over competing telegraph companies. The Toronto, Hamilton, and St. Catherines Electro-magnetic Telegraph Company, which had not been successful in expanding its lines, was absorbed by the Allen Company in 1852. Among the other Canadian telegraph companies which lacked the ability to compete and were taken over by the Montreal Telegraph Company were the Bytown and Montreal Telegraph Company, the Montreal and Troy Telegraph Company, and the Canada Grand Trunk Telegraph Line. The British North American Telegraph Association was still another company absorbed by the Montreal Telegraph Company in 1856.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph*, provides some detail regarding the numerous company mergers of this period and information on some of the major figures involved.





The British North American Telegraph Association, organized in 1847, operated lines in Canada East and had the ultimate aim of linking Canada and the British maritime colonies by telegraph. The Association in 1848 had dispatched Frederick N. Gisborne, a former Montreal Telegraph Company operator and one of the founders of the Association, to visit New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Gisborne was to make "such final arrangements as will ensure the immediate construction of the line from Halifax to Quebec."<sup>1</sup> This proved to be difficult because of the attitudes Gisborne encountered in the maritime governments.

New Brunswick refused to support a telegraph line which offered only branch connections to St. John and Fredericton. On the other hand, Nova Scotia was hesitant about paying Canadians for a service which an American company had already offered for nothing, except to ask for the right to construct lines in the colony.<sup>2</sup> Both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, with a sense of independence, decided upon alternatives to the British North American Telegraph Association scheme. Nova Scotia constructed government telegraph lines while New Brunswick allowed a private company to construct lines in the colony. In 1848 a link was completed

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. Martel, "Intercolonial Communications, 1840-1867," *C.H.A. Report* (1938), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



from Maine to St. John, resulting in direct connection with Boston a year later. Thereafter both colonies worked to link Halifax with St. John. The incentive for this link was provided by American newspapers--the recently formed Associated Press. They desired a rapid means of obtaining news dispatches from the Cunard ships arriving regularly in Halifax.<sup>1</sup> A Boston to Halifax telegraph link was complete by the end of 1849.

F. N. Gisborne had also been active during 1849, attempting to promote a telegraph connection with Canada and stressing the dangers in dependence upon foreign lines of communication. Funds for the British North American plan had been raised in Quebec, but maritime interest was in completing the American telegraph connection. The telegraph link to Canada was finally completed by the British North American Telegraph Association in 1851. The completed line connected Quebec with Fredericton and St. John via the Temiscouata route. The Association incurred great debt in the process and requested subsidies from the maritime governments. Nova Scotia turned its back on the Association's request for a subsidy for providing a public service; New Brunswick granted a subsidy of £250 a year for ten years.

At the end of that period, the line was taken over by the Canadian government which cut it off in 1864 "owing to

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* Until this line was complete in November, 1849, colourful pony express operated for a short time from Halifax to Digby, from where the news dispatches were taken by steamer to the end of wire at St. John.



lack of business." News and messages from Canada continued to come, as they had in the past via American lines.<sup>1</sup>

Steps toward American control of all telegraph lines in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick began in 1856 when the private lines in New Brunswick were leased to the American Union Telegraph Company. The Nova Scotia government had sold its telegraph lines in 1851 to the Nova Scotia Electric Telegraph Company. In 1860 these lines also were leased to American Union. In 1866 the Western Union Telegraph Company took over the American Union and the maritime telegraph leases in order to be in a dominant position for European telegraph traffic should the Atlantic cable project succeed. Thus maritime communication facilities were entirely in American control at the time of Confederation.

No matter who controlled the telegraph lines, in 1850 all were effectively blocked by one obstacle: the sea. Undersea telegraph cables were not possible until machinery was developed in 1847 by Werner Siemens to apply Gutta Percha to wire as insulation. Telegraph wires on land needed only to be insulated at points where they touched the poles but undersea cables needed to be fully protected from water, to be armoured against rock and tide damage, and protected

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.





from biological damage.<sup>1</sup>

This development was first successfully applied in 1850 with the laying of an undersea cable across the English Channel from England to France. Although both Morse and Wheatstone had experimented with undersea cables, John W. Brett, a former antique dealer, chartered the General Oceanic and Subterranean Electric Printing Telegraphic Company which laid the cable. The avowed objects of Brett's company were:

to establish a telegraphic communication from the British Islands across the Atlantic Ocean to Nova Scotia and Canada and establishing electric communication by land and sea with the Colonies.<sup>2</sup>

The London *Times* described the achievement in the following terms:

The Electric telegraph appears to us more like a miracle than any scientific discovery or mechanical achievement of our time. We had scarcely taught ourselves to acquiesce in the idea that instantaneous communication between two points on solid land was a mere matter of course that it was gravely proposed to drop the communicating line and transmit intelligence along the bottom of the ocean. The jest or scheme of yesterday has become the fact of today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gutta Percha is the coagulated latex of certain trees of the Sapotaceae family which grow in the Malay Peninsula and resembles rubber in its chemical composition. Gutta Percha, unlike rubber which deteriorates with exposure to seawater, is quite flexible when heated but is inelastic at normal temperatures. Michael Faraday recognized Gutta Percha's insulating properties and after its adoption in the mid-nineteenth century, it was used almost exclusively until the early twentieth century in undersea cables. G. R. M. Garratt, *One Hundred Years of Submarine Cables* (London: 1950), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times* (London), 31 August 1850; cited in Garratt, *One Hundred Years*, p. 10.



The success of early undersea cables led to improvements in the insulation and a rapid spread of undersea cables. The pioneer work done in Britain established Britain as the center of a network of cables. It also firmly established Britain as the world leader in the manufacture of telegraph equipment and undersea cables, of great advantage to Britain in the control and administration of the mid-Victorian Empire.

The success of the earliest undersea cables held great significance for the North American maritime colonies of Great Britain, which were dependent largely upon communication by sea. Credit for the earliest North American cable scheme belongs to F. N. Gisborne.<sup>1</sup> In 1851 following the success of the Channel cables Gisborne conferred with the Newfoundland government on behalf of the New York, Newfoundland, and London Telegraph Company. The idea he presented was for a land telegraph from St. John's to Cape Ray near Port aux Basques in south-west Newfoundland, then connection by steamer or cable to Cape Breton, and a telegraph and cable to Halifax. The Newfoundland government made an initial grant of funds for a telegraph survey over the unexplored route.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of 1851, however, Gisborne had altered his

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<sup>1</sup>Gisborne severed his connection with the British North American Telegraph Association in 1849. During 1849 and 1850 he was Head of the Nova Scotia Government Telegraphs.

<sup>2</sup>Brown, *The Story of Canadian Invention*, p. 112.



scheme to a land telegraph from St. John's to Cape Ray, a cable across Cabot Strait to Cape Breton, then another cable to East Point, Prince Edward Island. His company acquired telegraph charter rights on Prince Edward Island and completed a telegraph from Charlottetown to Cape Traverse in 1852. In the same year Gisborne laid a nine-mile cable across Northumberland Strait to the Island, one of the few cables in North America and the first in British North America.<sup>1</sup> Despite these successes Gisborne in 1852 once again began to promote the route he had first considered to Newfoundland. Cape Breton was linked to the mainland by cable in 1853, but he was forced to halt work on the Newfoundland telegraph due to lack of funds. His company was in virtual bankruptcy, the land line across Newfoundland was only partially complete, and no cable connected Newfoundland to Cape Breton Island.

Frederick Gisborne journeyed to New York City early in 1854 in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade his American creditors to extend further funds for his telegraph project. A chance conversation in the Astor Hotel lobby led Gisborne to be introduced to Cyrus Field, a wealthy merchant recently retired. Cyrus Field, with the advice of his brother Matthew who was a civil engineer, examined Gisborne's conception in detail and eventually in March expanded it to include a

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<sup>1</sup>*The Gazette* (Montreal), 20 September, 1933.



cable across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>1</sup> Gisborne soon relinquished complete direction of the scheme to Field who restructured the existing telegraph company to include a number of other prominent American and British investors including Samuel Morse, John Pender, and J. W. Brett. The Newfoundland Legislature granted a new charter to the New York, Newfoundland, and London Telegraph Company on April 15, 1854. Under the terms of the charter the Company received a fifty year monopoly to operate all telegraph lines and cables touching the island in return for establishing a line of communication between America and Europe by way of Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> At this time the longest existing cable in the world was 140 miles and a cable had never been laid in waters over 30 fathoms in depth.

The Newfoundland land line, a cable to Cape Breton Island, and connection to New York were all completed by 1856. The cost to Field and his associates was far higher than initially had been expected. Because of the difficulty of raising further capital for the Atlantic cable, it was necessary to restructure the corporation into the Atlantic Telegraph Company in the late fall of 1856. The capital of

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Carter, *Cyrus Field: Man of Two Worlds* (New York: 1968), pp. 94-105; also see: Isabella F. Judson, ed., *Cyrus W. Field: His Life and Work 1819-1892* (New York: 1969).

<sup>2</sup>F. W. Chesson, *The Atlantic Cables. A Review of Recent Telegraphic Legislation in Canada* (London: 1875), pp. 44-45.





the restructured corporation was £350,000. Following a first unsuccessful attempt to lay the cable in 1857, two ships completed the undertaking in August, 1858. Due to the primitive nature of the cable manufacturing techniques, and the crude equipment on the cable laying ships, the completed cable deteriorated rapidly. It ceased to operate entirely on September 1st, 1858, with a consequent rapid decline in the stock of the company. The total financial loss was over £500,000. Cyrus Field described the attitude which he then encountered:

No words can describe the change in the public mind after the cable ceased to work. The great majority on both sides of the Atlantic believed the enterprise never could be a success, and considered those who had been engaged in it as lunatics.<sup>1</sup>

A successful Atlantic cable was to require eight additional years and several million dollars in investment.

The prospects for an Atlantic cable brightened somewhat in 1861 following the release of a report of the Committee on Submarine Telegraphy authorized by the Board of Trade.<sup>2</sup> This report recommended that with more care in manufacture, laying, and maintenance submarine cables, which to this point had generally failed with great loss of public funds, could be successful. As a result of this report and

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Appendix III, pp. 73-74.

<sup>2</sup>John W. Cell, *British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Policy Making Process* (New Haven: 1970), pp. 243-44.



his own seemingly boundless enthusiasm, Cyrus Field was successful in renewing interest in the scheme in 1862. Several other developments also took place which aided the eventual success of lengthy deep water cables. The Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company was formed from two existing companies: one an insulating company and the other a cable manufacturing firm. Thus for the first time extensive lengths of cable could be manufactured and insulated at the same place, reducing the abrasions suffered by the cable through excessive handling and storage. In addition, experiments had more accurately shown the types of cable required for ocean depths. The Atlantic cable project benefitted from one further circumstance--the *Great Eastern*, the largest ship afloat in 1865. The *Great Eastern*, which was available in 1865 to lay the Atlantic cable, was capable of carrying on board the entire 2,000 miles of cable, greatly simplifying the cable laying process.<sup>1</sup>

The *Great Eastern* voyage of 1865 was unsuccessful in laying an Atlantic cable. Fall storms in the Atlantic forced a halt to the work with the cable broken in mid-Atlantic in 2,000 fathoms of water. Field made still another nearly desperate attempt to raise additional capital for a fourth cable. He met with success but was forced to reorganize and form the Anglo-American Telegraph Company. Plans were

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<sup>1</sup>Garratt, *One Hundred Years*, pp. 19-20.



made to manufacture an improved type of cable for the 1866 attempt.<sup>1</sup> Also equipment was designed and constructed to raise the broken end of the 1865 cable from the ocean floor. Everything was prepared by July, 1866, when the *Great Eastern* embarked from Valentia, Ireland. On this occasion everything worked as planned and the cable was laid to Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, in 14 days. By September the broken 1865 cable had been raised, found to be operable and also landed at Trinity Bay. Two Atlantic cables were thus in operation in 1867 and available for exchanges of congratulations between the new Dominion of Canada and Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

In the final analysis the achievement of a successful Atlantic cable, the forerunner of dozens of other major cable projects in all parts of the world, was not due to the work of any single individual. While Cyrus Field's persistence gave continuing life to the project, the cable required the cooperation of electrical, mechanical, and marine engineers, oceanographers, and many other specialists. One author has

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<sup>1</sup>The previous three attempts had used only a single type of cable. The 1866 cable was composed of three types of varying thickness to enable it to survive in different depths of water. This modern type of cable had thick armoured sections on each shore end and relatively thinner sections as the water deepened. For background information on the cable laying attempts and on telegraphy in Newfoundland see Charles Bright, *The Story of the Atlantic Cable* (London: 1903).

<sup>2</sup>Rates at first were set at one pound per word making the cable available for only limited business. Atlantic rates gradually were reduced through competition to four shillings per word by 1888, when eight cables were in operation.





stated that the Atlantic cable, ". . . marked the beginning of the modern era of great engineering accomplishments, when experts in many fields pool their knowledge and skills to achieve a common goal."<sup>1</sup>

The success of the Atlantic cable was greeted by lavish praise and high honors in all parts of Great Britain and North America. This success ended another visionary project--the Collins Overland Telegraph Project. This plan, a bold one in an era of adventurous projects, was for the construction of an inter-continental telegraph line from North America via the Bering Straits, then across Asia to Europe. The scheme appeared to be a logical connection between the existing continental telegraph systems. Perry McDonough Collins hoped to be the man to supply the connection of the American telegraph and the Russian telegraph in Siberia.

The original route of Collins' scheme crossed Alaska, the southern Yukon, through British Columbia, across Hudson's Bay Company territories, and through Canada to Montreal to join the American telegraph system. Working toward this end in 1859, Collins received a Canadian charter for a Transmundane Telegraph Company. He also discussed the project with officials of the Hudson's Bay Company including Sir George Simpson, who apparently was willing to consider the scheme but was skeptical of the ability and influence

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<sup>1</sup>C. C. Furness, *The Engineer* (New York: 1966), p. 61.



of Collins. The United States' decision in 1860 to build a telegraph to California, combined with British Colonial Office reluctance to support Collins' project, put an end to the Transmundane scheme.<sup>1</sup>

Although Collins dropped the idea of crossing Hudson's Bay Company lands and Canada with his telegraph, he continued to work toward his goal. He shifted his emphasis to British Columbia, where a trans-continental line could connect with lines of the California State Telegraph Company which reached New Westminster by 1864.<sup>2</sup> Collins by the spring of 1864 had secured the permission of the British Colonial Office and British Columbia government to construct a telegraph through the colony. Collins received non-exclusive rights, timber rights along the right-of-way, and permission to import duty free materials--all valid for only six years unless the line should be created by that time. Collins arranged the financing of his vast project by reaching an agreement with the Western Union Company in March of 1864. The Western Union Company issued special "Extension Stock" to finance the 5,000 miles of telegraph line. A merger of the two companies was planned after the completion of the project.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. Galbraith, "Perry McDonough Collins At The Colonial Office," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XVII, Nos. 3 and 4 (1953), 208.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Corday Mackay, "The Collins Overland Telegraph," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, X, No. 3 (1946), 195.



Surveys and work toward the telegraph began in British Columbia during the summer and fall of 1865. Nothing substantial was done in the other areas until 1866. The British Columbia government was quite eager to have improved communication established with the gold areas of the interior. The infusion of money into the economy was also anticipated. Although the failure of the 1865 attempt by Field to lay an Atlantic cable was encouraging news to Collins, progress on the telegraph was discouraging. Difficulties in locating an acceptable route in the virtually unexplored north of British Columbia were far greater than anticipated. In the southern section problems of construction also arose.<sup>1</sup> The Collins Overland pushed forward and by the fall of 1866 had reached a latitude of 55.42 N. and longitude of 128.15 W., 378 miles north of Quesnel. There were 15 line stations, one every 25 miles and a clearing 20 feet wide through standing timber and 12 feet wide through fallen timber. Enough material had been moved into the northern areas to allow an additional 350 miles to be built the following year. All of this effort proved pointless, for developments in connection with the Atlantic cable moved more rapidly to a successful conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Robb, "The Collins' Overland or Russian Extension Telegraph Project: A Pioneer Attempt to Establish Telegraphic Communications Between North America and Europe" (unpublished Master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1968), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Mackay, *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, X, No. 3, 207.



In June, 1866, the Western Union Telegraph Company, without whose support the project could not survive, absorbed the American Telegraph Company whose system included all lines to which an Atlantic cable would connect. Thus Western Union was in a position to cover all eventualities in regard to communication with Europe. The first Atlantic cable was laid in July, 1866, and by August 26 was in continuous operation.

Western Union did not finally order a halt to work on the Collins scheme until March, 1867, and some parties continued work in remote areas in Siberia until mid-summer before the information reached them. The Western Union Telegraph Company, which absorbed a loss of nearly \$3,000,000 in the enterprise, continued to operate the completed lines in British Columbia until February, 1871, when all were leased perpetually to the British Columbia government. In July of 1871 the Dominion government in turn assumed control of the lines in accordance with the terms under which British Columbia entered Confederation. The lines were maintained and extended in the Cariboo over the next decade. Finally, on January 1, 1881, the Western Union Telegraph Company's 430 miles of line and 16 miles of cable in the province were purchased outright by the Dominion government.<sup>1</sup> The line beyond Quesnel had been abandoned after

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<sup>1</sup>Canada. *Sessional Papers*, (hereinafter cited as *C.S.P.*), 1882, No. 7, xlv.





1866, and much of the assembled material was allowed to waste away in the wilderness.

The Collins project was valuable to British Columbia, although its main aim failed. British Columbia secured connection to San Francisco and the rest of the world; Victoria and New Westminster were no longer solely dependent upon ships for communication; a system of communication to the interior was developed which otherwise would have been delayed many years; and the economy benefited from the money spent on construction. Although the Collins line never actually reached Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River in Northern British Columbia, the name survived from the Collins project and the later Dominion Government telegraph line to the Yukon used part of the Collins route and crossed the river at this spot. Collins has received some much-deserved praise: "[his] energetic activity on behalf of his telegraph deserves an accolade as one of the illustrious failures in the history of communications."<sup>1</sup>

The Collins scheme was contemporary to another grand conception for expansion of communication facilities in British North America: the Atlantic and Pacific Transit and Telegraph Company, conceived by Edward Watkin, to provide first telegraphic then communication by road to the Pacific from Canada through Hudson's Bay Company territories. This project was the outgrowth of Watkin's activities over the

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<sup>1</sup>Galbraith, *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XVII, Nos. 3 and 4, 214.



previous two years as Superintending Commissioner of the Grand Trunk Railway and as the Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle's "unofficial, unpaid, never-tiring agent in these great enterprises. . . . "<sup>1</sup>

Ideas of transcontinental communication had been previously suggested but had always focused on a railway connection and had been suggested by men in no position to implement these schemes.<sup>2</sup> Edward Watkin, after a first hand investigation of conditions in British North America, was able to recommend in November 1861, that the salvation of the Grand Trunk lay in westward expansion. More than this, however, Watkin saw imperial interests at stake as the United States expanded into the West.<sup>3</sup> Watkin recommended to Newcastle that the Imperial government guarantee interest to allow construction on the Intercolonial Railway; that Pacific transit in the form of roads and telegraphs must be started; that Confederation must be pushed; and that the position of the Hudson's Bay Company must be clarified.<sup>4</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup>Sir E. W. Watkin, *Canada and the States: Recollections 1851 to 1886* (London: 1887), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, Vol. II: 1763-1870, Vol. XXII of *The Hudson's Bay Record Society* (London: 1959), pp. 822-25.

<sup>3</sup>At this time telegraph and cable schemes could be justified for Imperial purposes while less encouragement was given to railways. J. S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company As An Imperial Factor 1821-1869* (Toronto: 1957), p. 365.

<sup>4</sup>Watkin, *Canada and the States*, p. 81.



was apparent that:

The significant point in this programme was that it tacitly accepted that a railway to the Pacific might prove too expensive, so that the political and strategic advantages would have to be secured by preliminary routes by road and telegraph.<sup>1</sup>

Within Canada there was support for these recommendations, but the political and economic situation prevented positive steps from being taken. In this situation, when support failed to come from the Imperial government despite the formation of a British North American Association with the object of spreading information on Canada and the maritimes to dispel the ignorance which prevented the British government from acting, "Canadian feeling rallied behind the cheapest method of achieving the necessary results--communication by road and telegraph."<sup>2</sup> Canadian Governor Edmund Head had recommended as early as September, 1858, in a report to the Colonial Office on the Hudson's Bay Company Charter that: ". . . it might be feasible to establish within a given time telegraphic communication between Fraser's River and Halifax; or now, in fact, directly with Great Britain."<sup>3</sup>

In 1862 the Canadian government approached the Hudson's Bay Company's local Governor Alexander Dallas with a

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<sup>1</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, p. 826.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 828.

<sup>3</sup>G. P. deT. Glazebrook, "Document: A Letter on the West by Sir Edmund Head," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXI (1940), 59.





suggestion that the Company and Canada should cooperate in the construction of a telegraph line to the Pacific. The Company, however, had no funds for such construction and were more interested in surrendering their rights in the area which would allow settlement to replace the fur trade.<sup>1</sup> The Committee of the Company, however, had not ruled out the possibility of a group other than the Company acquiring by lease or purchase the rights to build a telegraph through the Company's lands. Newcastle, the Colonial Secretary, described by one historian, "as an enthusiastic supporter of projects for the improvement of transportation and communication facilities, always provided that they involved no charge upon the Imperial Treasury"<sup>2</sup> encouraged such projects much as possible.

In 1862 a powerful group of British capitalists led by Thomas Baring and representing both the Grand Trunk interests and the British North American Association, which included Edward Watkin, took the opportunity of inquiring about terms for a transit scheme from the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>3</sup> The Company responded without enthusiasm to the transit scheme but reiterated the offer to sell the interests of the Company. Edward Watkin pressed this opening and

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<sup>1</sup>Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, pp. 373-74.

<sup>2</sup>Galbraith, *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XVII, Nos. 3 and 4, 210.

<sup>3</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, p. 830.



in the fall of 1862 and spring of 1863, explored the possibilities of buying *in toto* the interests of the Company--his aim to further the interests of the Grand Trunk, to advance his Atlantic and Pacific Transit and Telegraph scheme, and to promote imperial interests in the West. During this period Watkin also negotiated with representatives of the Canadian government regarding the extent which the Government would support the transit scheme.<sup>1</sup>

Terms for the sale of the Hudson's Bay Company were finalized in May of 1863 and the sale was accomplished by mid-June. The withdrawal of Thomas Baring and George Carr Glyn from the list of Watkin's financial backers meant that he was forced to turn to a recently created International Financial Society. This Society was formed for participating in financial, commercial, and industrial operations in England and abroad. It was backed by numerous merchant banking houses in The City and was closely tied to the *Crédit Mobilier* of France.<sup>2</sup> The transfer actually involved not the Company but the shares of all of the old Hudson's Bay Company Committee members except two. The same offer was to stand for the three hundred other shareholders for a limited period. Most of them accepted the terms of £300 per share.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Watkin, *Canada and the States*, pp. 97-99; Harold A. Innis, *A History Of The Canadian Pacific Railway* (London: 1923), pp. 40-45.

<sup>2</sup>Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, pp. 386-87.

<sup>3</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, p. 837.



Edmund Head, formerly Governor General of Canada, became Governor at the insistence of Newcastle. Watkin immediately left for Canada in June, 1963, "to push forward the main objective of the New Committee, the development of communications through the Company's territories."<sup>1</sup> The objectives of the Committee appeared within reach. Promise of a guarantee from the governments of Canada and British Columbia had been obtained. The Hudson's Bay Company had agreed, in fact, in April to provide the land necessary for Watkin's Atlantic and Pacific Transit and Telegraph Company. Watkin, although holding considerable shares, did not control the company nor did he hold a place on the Board of Directors. And so as Watkin worked in Canada and Red River in 1863 to advance his scheme, the Committee of the Company adopted a policy for realizing value from the Company's lands.<sup>2</sup>

Watkin during the summer of 1863 had made arrangements with O. S. Wood, the Manager of the Montreal Telegraph Company, to oversee the construction of the line from Fort Garry to Jasper House. Furthermore, the Montreal Telegraph Company was to build a line from Halifax, Nova Scotia, and make a through line with existing connections as far as

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 842.

<sup>2</sup>Duane C. Tway, "The Wintering Partners And The Hudson's Bay Company, 1863 To 1871," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXIII, No. 1 (1952), 50.



Sault Ste. Marie. Watkin's company was to construct the section from the Sault to Fort Garry and from Jasper House to Fort Langley--provided the respective governments of Canada and British Columbia would provide financial assistance. In addition, Watkin hoped to tie this system into the American telegraph system at Pembina with a company-constructed extension from Fort Garry.<sup>1</sup>

There were many rivals to Watkin's scheme, including Perry Collins' ambitious project. Local Governor Alexander Dallas advised the Hudson's Bay Company not to rashly commit itself to one scheme or agreement but rather to survey the territory from Fort Garry to Jasper House with a view to building a Company-owned telegraph. This survey would be undertaken during the summer of 1864 by John Rae, who had previously seen much survey and exploration work with the Company.<sup>2</sup> Following the survey Rae concluded that there should be no major obstacle to the construction of a telegraph by way of Edmonton and Jasper House to British

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<sup>1</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, p. 843; Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 393; Watkin, *Canada and the States*, pp. 174-79, and pp. 186-87.

<sup>2</sup>Rae had recently completed the land sections of a survey for a projected combined telegraph and cable system from England to North America by way of the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. J. M. Wordie, "Introduction," *John Rae's Correspondence With The Hudson's Bay Company on Arctic Exploration: 1844-1855*, Vol. XVI of *The Hudson's Bay Record Society* (London: 1953), ciii; Ross Mitchell, "Physician, Fur Trader and Explorer," *The Beaver*, CCLXVII (September, 1936), 20, 65.





Columbia.<sup>1</sup> Considerable material for the telegraph was actually purchased and assembled in Red River, Victoria and York Factory before the project was dropped.<sup>2</sup> Despite Watkin's energetic work and Rae's favourable report, the Committee and Governor failed to support Watkin "probably because they were already in negotiations with the Colonial Office for the transfer of at least the fertile belt to the Crown, . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Watkin was terribly disappointed by the reaction to his ambitious plans, which he asserted had been responsible for the installation of a new Board of Directors. The Company, however, began to go its own way independent of Watkin. A. S. Morton has said of Watkin's ambitious scheme, "The project was premature. It was none the less the harbinger of a new age."<sup>4</sup>

The Hudson's Bay Company did not reject the concept of extension of telegraph facilities within their territory, as the 1864 Rae telegraph survey demonstrates. In the numerous proposals and lengthy negotiations with the Colonial

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<sup>1</sup>Rae's Report is in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, E.15/12, Reel No. 4M24; a copy is in the Fleming Papers, vol. 40, no. 284.

<sup>2</sup>Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 394.

<sup>3</sup>A. S. Morton, *A History Of The Canadian West To 1870-71: Being A History Of Rupert's Land (The Hudson's Bay Company's Territory) And Of The North-West Territory (Including The Pacific Slope)* (London: 1939), p. 842.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 793.



Office under Edward Cardwell after the resignation of Newcastle in 1864, the telegraph was safeguarded by the Company. Head proposed retention of five square miles of land for each mile of telegraph, a concession Newcastle had previously approved.<sup>1</sup> This would have given the Company a valuable corridor along the line selected for the telegraph and possibly someday used for a railway. There was a fundamental difference in attitude, however, between Cardwell and Newcastle on the entire issue. Cardwell favoured working through the Canadian authorities, who had rejected an offer to cooperate with the Company on a telegraph unless it was accompanied by a road. The previous agreement had been for Canada to connect the Company telegraph with a line running to Lake Superior as well as to guarantee to pay interest on construction costs at 4 per cent to a limit of £10,000 per year. The Company was ready to proceed with the project but only with Canadian assistance.<sup>2</sup>

In December, 1864, the Company restated its terms for surrender of concessions in the North-West. Regarding the telegraph in light of the Canadian government's reluctance to support the project, the Company offered to hand over the materials for the telegraph in return for costs

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<sup>1</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, 859.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 860-61; Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 394.



and expenses as part of the transaction. Rae's telegraph report was now available; it demonstrated that no difficulties should prevent the construction of a telegraph and road via the Yellowhead Pass and Fraser Canyon to New Westminster. The Confederation scheme was at this time undergoing the troubled process of birth, and no offer was forthcoming from the Canadians. The situation remained unchanged until the British North America Act and the creation of the Dominion government. Western expansion now depended upon assumption of the Western lands. Canada, led by John A. Macdonald, wanted the British government to expropriate the Hudson's Bay Company's holdings, while the Colonial Office wanted direct negotiations between Canada and the Company.<sup>1</sup> In regard to communication facilities the Company, represented in 1868 by the Earl of Kimberley, continued to offer the surrender of all facilities for communication and to offer all materials assembled for a telegraph.<sup>2</sup> When the settlement between Canada and the Company finally came in 1869 after the exertion of some pressure by the Colonial Secretary, Canada agreed to purchase the telegraph materials at cost price, including transport but not interest and allowing for deterioration.<sup>3</sup> Thus, despite Watkin's efforts, the Rae telegraph survey, and efforts made by the Company in

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<sup>1</sup>Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, 859.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 879.

<sup>3</sup>Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, 423.





the 1865-1869 period, Canada acquired Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories without any form of telegraphic communication. The materials acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company by the Canadian government were soon put to use as a Dominion Government Telegraph system was constructed in the West.<sup>1</sup>

The Canadian government in an effort to provide direct and rapid contact with the newly acquired North-West arranged with the North-Western Telegraph Company to have their lines extended to Fort Garry from Minnesota. This was completed in 1871.<sup>2</sup> The Liberal government in 1874 entered into contracts to have various sections of a line built along what was thought to be the projected route of a Pacific railway from the Great Lakes to British Columbia. A trail or road and cleared right-of-way were to accompany this government-owned Pacific railway telegraph line. The line was complete beyond Battleford by 1876 and arrived in Edmonton in 1879.<sup>3</sup> The connection to Lake Superior was also pushed and had been completed from Fort William to Selkirk in 1878.<sup>4</sup> These contracts provided for the

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. Macdonald, "The Dominion Telegraph," *Canadian North-West Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 1, No. VI (1930), p. 15; hereinafter cited as Macdonald, "Dominion Telegraph."

<sup>2</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1872, No. 42, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Sandford Fleming, *Report In Reference To The Canadian Pacific Railway* (Ottawa: 1879), pp. 6-7; Allen Ronaghan, "The Telegraph Line to Edmonton," *Alberta Historical Review*, XVIII, No. 4 (1970), 15-16.

<sup>4</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1879, No. 43, p. 156.



construction, maintenance, and operation of the telegraph lines.<sup>1</sup> This system proved unsatisfactory, due to the exorbitant rates charged and the undependable service. The eventual result was that the Dominion government took over the operation of the lines on June 30, 1882 under the Telegraph And Signal Service, Department of Public Works.<sup>2</sup> The government acquired responsibility for operating a line which was now along the abandoned Pacific railway route and thus little used, a line sadly in disrepair and constructed from generally inferior materials, and one on which monthly expenses far outweighed revenue.<sup>3</sup> The government surrendered all interest in the Port Arthur to Winnipeg telegraph (433 miles) to the Canadian Pacific Railway in July, 1883 under the terms of their contract.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of these conditions, general consolidation of the Dominion Government Telegraph took place involving the abandonment in the North-West of extensive sections of the existing line in favour of using C.P.R. lines, and a program of renewal of other lines "in territory where it would not be profitable for commercial telegraph companies

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming, *Report in Reference*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1883, No. 10, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>F. N. Gisborne, "Telegraph Lines--North West Territories," 8 November 1883. Report included as Appendix in Macdonald, "Dominion Telegraph," pp. 55-57.

<sup>4</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1885, No. 10, p. cxiii.



to enter."<sup>1</sup> This included, in addition to 620 miles of North-West lines, those acquired in British Columbia in 1871, cables and lines along the St. Lawrence, and cables to islands and lighthouses for purposes of navigation.<sup>2</sup> These services were operated for the benefit of the population and never were commercially profitable. The first Superintendent of the Government Telegraph was F. N. Gisborne, who had never recovered financially from his involvement with the earliest Atlantic cables, though he was a leading figure in the technical aspects of telegraphy and cable technology in Canada.

A narrative of the development of the telegraph in the North-West remains incomplete without attention to the role played by Sandford Fleming. Fleming perhaps more than any other man stamped the direction taken in North-Western telegraph expansion. Fleming, however, was not directly associated with any of the various schemes for providing telegraphic service to the West in the 1860's. He spent his early years in Canada working on various railway projects, giving him an appreciation of and a familiarity with the telegraph. At a public lecture in Port Hope in 1858, Fleming outlined his initial ideas for a railway to the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> This was not an uncommon theme for imaginative

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<sup>1</sup>Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph*, 124.

<sup>2</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1882, No. 7, pp. xiv-xivii.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence J. Burpee, *Sandford Fleming: Empire Builder* (Oxford: 1915), p. 258.



writers and lecturers in Canada in the 1850's. However, once Fleming adopted an idea, he continually refined and tested it. Although he had never visited the North-West, he was asked to expand his ideas for a railway to the Pacific by Henry Youle Hind, whom Fleming had encountered through the Royal Canadian Institute. Hind shared Fleming's views regarding the practicality of such a scheme. Fleming's view appeared in a chapter, "Practical Observations On The Construction Of A Continuous Line Of Railway From Canada To The Pacific Ocean On British Territory," in Hind's *A Sketch Of An Overland Route To British Columbia*. Hind's intention was to stress,

The way by which, first British Columbia, then China, then India, may be reached from Europe. The way by which British civilization, laws and liberty are to be carried to the Pacific, and thence to Asia, through British America.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming's treatment of the subject stressed the variety of ways that people had considered thus far to open up the North-West to communication: roads, railways, water transport, etc. Fleming dismissed as impractical those based entirely or partly on water transport, and advocated a railway and a telegraph.<sup>2</sup> At this time he doubted if a telegraph could be

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Youle Hind, *A Sketch of an Overland Route to British Columbia* (Toronto: 1862), p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>Sandford Fleming, "Practical Observations On The Construction Of A Continuous Line Of Railway From Canada To The Pacific Ocean On British Territory," in Hind, *A Sketch of an Overland Route*, p. 84.





maintained independently of a railway.<sup>1</sup> Fleming arrived at the conclusion that the project of a railway and telegraph to the Pacific was so large that to be constructed at all it must be viewed as a work of time.<sup>2</sup> In connection with how the work should be carried out, Fleming studied the stages in the establishment of lines of internal communication within the Province of Canada. On the basis of this Fleming advocated that progressive stages of development be followed.

The first effort should be made to construct an Electric Telegraph along the precise line of the future Railway, that the Telegraph should be the precursor of other means of communication, beginning it may be, with a Bridle Path or Indian Trail from post to post, and ending with a perfect line of Railway, when the traffic of the country, or the interests of the Nations required the most rapid means of steam communication.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming added:

The extreme importance of the Telegraphic communication extending from colony to colony across the country, even during the earliest stages of settlement, is too apparent to need comment, and being constructed on the precise lines of the intended wagon road and of the ultimate Railway, it would always be in the position where its services would be called into requisition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.



Fleming filled in the details of his plan by discussing immigration and the time periods that development would take, as well as the expected cost of development. He presented a picture of a comprehensive scheme for development of frontier areas.

The publication of the Hind book and Fleming's writings gave him a wider reputation used by James Ross, co-editor of the *Nor'Wester* in Red River. Fleming was requested in the spring of 1863 to carry a petition from a "mass meeting" in Red River to the Canadian Government and to the Duke of Newcastle. The petition called for support for a telegraph and road to Red River through British territory.<sup>1</sup>

This happened to coincide with Watkin's attempt to promote support for a telegraph scheme across the North-West, and immediately preceded Fleming's appointment as Surveyor of the Intercolonial for Canada. Fleming undoubtedly supported Watkin's scheme as he would have any other which promised an all-British communication to the Pacific. He remained

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming apparently added his own summary entitled, "The Political and Commercial Importance of a Communication to Red River, on British Territory." Burpee, *Sandford Fleming* claims that Fleming presented both documents to John Sandfield Macdonald and Lord Monck, and then sailed for England to see Newcastle at the Colonial Office. Although nothing resulted from the memorials, Fleming was appointed Engineer in charge of the Intercolonial Railway surveys. J. S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, claims Fleming was an intimate of Watkin and there is "suspicion that railway interests represented by Watkin were involved in its circulation." (p. 382) E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, II, says Fleming "fell into co-operation" with Canadian politicians against the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company; Rich incorrectly states that Fleming was already involved in the Intercolonial surveys when he went to London (p. 852).



convinced that: ". . . telegraphy will act as the spinal cord of a national nervous system destined to ramify indefinitely throughout the great transatlantic division of the British Empire."<sup>1</sup>

For Fleming there followed years of work on the surveys for the Intercolonial for Canada, for Nova Scotia, and for New Brunswick.<sup>2</sup> In 1871 he was appointed as Engineer-in-Chief of the Pacific Railway, a position he held under both the Conservative and the Liberal Governments. During this period Fleming was responsible for the earliest development of the telegraph in the North-West. It was introduced exactly along the lines outlined by him ten years earlier.<sup>3</sup> The telegraph was to be erected as soon as the survey located the line. "Accordingly, contracts were entered into for the erection of the telegraph as soon as the location of the line was established."<sup>4</sup>

These lines were eventually incorporated into the Canadian Government Telegraph and into the Canadian Pacific

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 95, "Principles of Railway Construction in New Territory," [copy] submitted to the Province of Canada, 1863.

<sup>2</sup>For this aspect of Fleming's career see: Alan Wilson, "Fleming and Tupper: The Fall of the Siamese Twins, 1880," *Character and Circumstance, Essays in Honor of Donald Grant Creighton*, ed. John S. Moir (Toronto: 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Province of Canada. Sessional Papers, 1863, No. 83.

<sup>4</sup>For details see: Sandford Fleming, *Report On Surveys and Preliminary Operations On The Canadian Pacific Railway Up To January 1877* (Ottawa: 1877), pp. 40-41, 78.





Railway Telegraph.<sup>1</sup> The C.P.R. assumed control of the Fort William to Winnipeg section of the Dominion line under their 1880 Contract, and pushed a telegraph which was officially formed as the C.P.R. Telegraph on January 1, 1886, although it had been partially operative for the previous five years. The telegraph showed net earnings of \$145,000 in 1885 as a result of heavy press coverage of the second Riel rebellion. This income convinced C.P.R. President Van Horne of the importance of the telegraph business, and by September, 1886, the C.P.R. had made agreements for the first cross-Canada telegraph system and an arrangement with the Commercial Cable Company of New York to use that Company's Atlantic cables.<sup>2</sup> By the time of its completion the C.P.R. telegraph had only one major competitor in Canada--the Great North-Western Telegraph Company.

Erastus Wiman was the financial genius who succeeded in creating the Great North-Western Telegraph Company in May of 1880. This company was organized for the purpose of establishing and working telegraph lines in the North-West Territory, in the district of Keewatin, Manitoba, and British Columbia, and to connect with lines in Ontario. The

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<sup>1</sup>In this regard Fleming made an unsuccessful attempt to personally obtain the right to operate a telegraph line along the C.P.R. route in connection with a projected Pacific cable.

<sup>2</sup>*Financial Post*, 16 May 1964; Innis, *A History Of The Canadian Pacific*, p. 243.



President, Wiman, wished to enter into an arrangement with the other major existing telegraph companies, the Montreal, Dominion, and Western Union, to minimize competition. A Dominion Telegraph Company had been organized in 1871 to operate between Detroit and Quebec. It later extended its lines to the east and was a chief competitor of the Montreal Telegraph Company. Dominion had become an asset of the American-owned American Union Telegraph Company, which controlled extensive lines in the east and was controlled in turn by Western Union. Wiman, based in New York, came to an agreement with Western Union to lease the Dominion telegraph lines. He then threatened the Montreal Telegraph Company with stiff competition unless they leased their lines to his Great North-Western Telegraph Company. Reluctantly in July of 1881 Montreal turned over control of its lines, making Wiman's Great North-Western Telegraph Company the largest in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The telegraph in Canada developed regionally, reflecting the lack of common interest and the great distances between the somewhat isolated British colonies. Inter-colonial telegraphic communication depended upon American telegraph companies until after Confederation. Despite some early work in the field of telegraphy, much of the incentive for the expansion of an internal telegraph system in the

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 22, no. 155, "Telegraphic Legislation," n.d.; contains a summary of Canadian telegraph company history prepared from acts of incorporation; Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph*, pp. 116-18.



maritime colonies and in British Columbia came from efforts to provide communication facilities between Europe and the United States. The Atlantic cables and the Collins project both produced improved internal communication as well as external communication links. In central Canada the growth of independent telegraph companies combined with the rapid expansion of the telegraph connected with railway construction in the 1850's to produce an extensive internal telegraph system. No telegraph development occurred in the North-West prior to its acquisition by Canada despite numerous enthusiastic proposals.

Canada by the mid-1880's was served from Atlantic to Pacific by an extensive telegraph system linking the major provincial centres and Ottawa as well as providing communication in the North-West and to the larger islands on both coasts. Amalgamation of existing telegraph companies had produced progressively larger units until by the 1880's there were two large competing systems, a few regional companies, and government telegraph lines and cables in isolated areas. The commercially profitable sections of the system were largely privately owned and closely integrated with the American telegraph and cable companies. The Canadian government provided service in areas unlikely to attract private development of a telegraph. Canada continued to be the one Empire exception to state control of domestic telegraphs. In the area of telegraphic communication Canada adopted policies similar to those of the United





States rather than the state-ownership policies found in Great Britain and most other areas of the British Empire. There was, however, one major exception to the British Postmaster's control of the telegraph. The Post Office monopoly specifically excluded telegrams to or from places abroad.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of an extensive telegraphy system in Canada enabled Sandford Fleming, F. N. Gisborne, and others to plausibly consider extensions of the Canadian telegraph system to Asia by means of a Pacific cable. There was sufficient experience, capital, skill, and imagination within Canada for such a project to be considered. The Canadian Pacific Railway formed the first telegraph system that was essentially Canadian in ownership and potentially transcontinental in scope. This development opened a wider horizon for Canadian involvement in the world--especially in the Pacific. As the most notable innovation in communication technology in its era, the electric telegraph allowed Canada to assume a greater participation in the affairs of the British imperial community. The telegraph made a significant contribution to the unity of Canada by providing rapid, inexpensive and dependable communication for social, economic, political and military purposes during a crucial period in the nineteenth century when Canadian unity was often threatened by strong regional divisive forces.

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<sup>1</sup>F. J. Brown, *The Cable and Wireless Communications Of The World: A Survey Of Present Day Means Of International Communications* (London: 1927), p. 115.





## CHAPTER III

### AN ASIATIC CABLE

It was from the exchange of ideas between Sandford Fleming and F. N. Gisborne that the idea of a Canadian Pacific or Asiatic cable originated in the summer of 1879. Sandford Fleming remained as Engineer-in-Chief of the Pacific Railway within the newly created Department of Railways and Canals headed by his old friend and onetime business associate, Sir Charles Tupper. F. N. Gisborne, the Canadian with the greatest reputation in telegraph and cable construction, was also in the new department. Gisborne was appointed Superintendent of the Dominion Government Telegraph Service in 1879. The separation of Railways and Canals from Public Works on 20 May 1879 at the insistence of Tupper, then Minister of Public Works, was an indication of the primary interest taken by the Liberal-Conservative Macdonald Ministry in encouraging transportation and communication in the Canadian West. It was a fundamental part of Macdonald's "National Policy."

Fleming and Gisborne both ultimately claimed credit for the idea of a Canadian telegraph cable across the Pacific Ocean as an extension of the Pacific Railway telegraph. Which man actually originated the scheme remains an



unresolved question and one that caused a great deal of bitterness between Fleming and Gisborne. The earliest record of the Canadian scheme is in a letter of 9 June 1879 from Gisborne to Fleming in which the cable route to Asia is outlined.<sup>1</sup> He conceived using the wires of the Montreal Telegraph Company, controlled by Erastus Wiman, as far as Lake Nipissing. When complete, Dominion Government lines would be used from this point to the newly created Port Simpson on the Pacific Ocean. (In 1879 the Dominion lines extended only from Fort William to Edmonton.) A short cable would be laid from Port Simpson to the Queen Charlotte Islands. A cable would then be laid to Amlia, one of the American-owned Aleutian Islands and on to the Japanese Island of Yesso,<sup>2</sup> making two-1,650-mile sections of cable. It was felt that the North Pacific of the high latitudes would be as free of volcanic activity and coral as the similar latitudes in the Atlantic Ocean and thus favourable for cable laying.

Volcanic activity and abundance of coral were believed to have been responsible for the failure of an earlier American attempt to lay a cable from the United States to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. These conditions also plagued the cables in the Western Pacific running to

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 9 June 1879.

<sup>2</sup>Then also called Tezo or Yezo and today named Hokkaido.



Australia and New Zealand, causing frequent and expensive interruptions. The short cable sections to Japan would enable a higher rate of word transmission per minute<sup>1</sup> and thus make the cable profitable even at a per word rate lower than presently charged. The entire system would link with the Russian system (the ultimate aim of the earlier ill-fated Collins Overland Project) and create a monopoly of traffic and abundant business and revenue for the Canadian government telegraph system. Gisborne concluded his outline of the scheme with:

I therefore recommend that a through route from Ocean to Ocean be established and maintained under the immediate control of the Canadian Government and that at important stations such as Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Victoria, Government Operators be intrusted with Cipher readings & thereby greatly accelerate the despatch of public business.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming replied enthusiastically and thereafter, with Tupper's permission, incorporated the essence of this plan in his annual *Report*<sup>3</sup> on the Pacific Railway for 1879. However, to the end of his life he would claim that Gisborne produced the details of the scheme the day after he was personally contacted by Fleming in his capacity as Engineer-in-Chief regarding the extension of the Canadian Pacific telegraph across the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup>On the cables of the 1880's the rate dropped in direct relation to the length of the cable under the water.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 9 June 1879.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 104, Sandford Fleming, *Report and Documents In Reference To The Canadian Pacific Railway* (Ottawa: 1880).





In the spring of 1880 the Macdonald ministry found it necessary to replace Fleming as Engineer-in-Chief of the Pacific Railway, largely to give the appearance of a new railway policy in the face of mounting Opposition criticism.<sup>1</sup> Fleming left the government service with a minimum of ill feeling, considering the later investigation of all aspects of his conduct in connection with the Pacific Railway. His final *Report and Documents In Reference To The Canadian Pacific Railway*, written in the spring of 1880, was his last official act as Engineer-in-Chief. Fleming continued to maintain close personal relations with Tupper, Macdonald, Langevin, and Lord Lorne, which he used to work privately for the Asiatic cable recommended in the Report.

The Report recommended several points in regard to the accompanying telegraph--all useful and, in fact, necessary if there was to be an Asiatic cable. It recommended as "essential that the construction of the telegraph should precede the railway."<sup>2</sup> This view was consistent with Fleming's philosophy about the order in which communication facilities should be developed in new territories. In addition, the telegraph would free the Canadian government from

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<sup>1</sup>For details see Alan Wilson, "Fleming and Tupper: The Fall of the Siamese Twins, 1880," *Character & Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton*, ed. John S. Moir (Toronto: 1970), pp. 99-127.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming, *1880 Report*, *op. cit.*, p. 30e.



dependence upon "foreign" lines. Canadian land lines, said Fleming, could either be government controlled, as in Great Britain and France, or transferred to some private company. "The telegraph completed and in operation from ocean to ocean opens up a prospect of extended usefulness, and promises advantages which do not alone concern Canada."<sup>1</sup>

The Report continued to outline the singularly fortunate geographic position occupied by the Canadian Pacific telegraph line, the increasing monetary importance of cable traffic, and the growing demand for increased communication facilities--all of which pointed to a need for an Asiatic cable to link ". . . the great centres of population and commerce of the world."<sup>2</sup> United States surveys and soundings in the North Pacific revealed ". . . a soft, oozy bottom presenting conditions similar to the North Atlantic Ocean, on the plateau of which cables have been successfully laid."<sup>3</sup> Canada would greatly benefit from the many political and commercial advantages to accrue from such a cable, linking the English speaking peoples of the Empire and the world and completing the telegraphic circuit of the globe.<sup>4</sup> In total, the section of the Report dealing with the Asiatic cable was enthusiastic and optimistic.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30f.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30g.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30g and 30h.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30i.



Fleming had begun to act in the matter of the cable even before his Report was printed. Tupper was approached in May regarding the possibility of obtaining exclusive landing rights for a cable on the Pacific coast of Canada and for the right to hang a wire on Pacific Railway telegraph posts, both rights to be granted to Fleming personally. Tupper responded with a Memorandum of 20 May to the Privy Council requesting such rights for Fleming on the following conditions: (1) that work began within three years and be complete within five years of the completion of the land telegraph; (2) that the cable be maintained efficiently; (3) that rates be subject to Privy Council approval if higher than the rates cited in the 1880 Report; (4) "That the Government reserve the right to take possession of the whole at any time after completion upon payment of a sum equal to the capital expended together with a reasonable percentage added."<sup>1</sup> These concessions were granted to Fleming, subject to Parliamentary approval, on 17 June 1880. Thus two weeks before Fleming had said farewell to his staff as Engineer-in-Chief he had laid the background for his projected new enterprise.

F. N. Gisborne, in England during this same period ostensibly carrying out his duties as head of the Canadian Telegraph Service, had been active regarding the enterprise.

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<sup>1</sup>Canadian High Commission Files, London, vol. 19, no. 66, *Privy Council Report*, 17 June 1880 (hereinafter cited C.H.C.); also see Fleming Papers, vol. 39, no. 280, F. Trudeau to Fleming, 20 June 1880.



He reported privately to Fleming in late June that he had interested John Pender, Chairman of the British owned Eastern Telegraph and the Eastern Extension Telegraph Companies, in the Canadian project.<sup>1</sup> Pender was reported to be very cooperative and desirous of having such a cable as an alternative to his existing lines.<sup>2</sup> Within a month Pender's true intent, to protect his lucrative monopoly, began to become apparent to Gisborne, who was forced to get information on the value of the telegraph business from North America to Asia ". . . by *hook or crook*."<sup>3</sup> Gisborne persisted in his quest, obtained the information on traffic revenue, and found that the value of North American traffic was more important than anticipated. This information opened the possibility of a subsidy from the United States--a possibility that Gisborne suggested to Fleming. He also warned Fleming that Sir James Anderson, one of the influential Eastern Company Directors, had circulated a paper prepared ". . . with the evident object of destroying the Canadian project."<sup>4</sup>

Fleming, still living in Ottawa, had not been idle following the success of his first petition to the Canadian government. Again he petitioned the government through his

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<sup>1</sup>This company had a monopoly on cables to Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 24 June 1880.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 July 1880.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 July 1880.





personal friend the Marquis of Lorne with a request that the British government approach Japan to acquire a site on which to land the cable. Fleming believed that such a site should be ceded to Britain and thus be under the British flag.<sup>1</sup>

This idea demonstrated a singular lack of understanding of conditions in Japan on Fleming's part. Fleming had also emphasized his case with a personal letter to Macdonald.<sup>2</sup> A day later the Canadian Privy Council approved instructions that A. T. Galt, recently appointed to the new post of Canadian High Commissioner in London, should make such a request of the British government.<sup>3</sup> At the same time Tupper informed Gisborne that Sir John A. Macdonald<sup>4</sup> ". . . contemplates having an interview with the Japanese Embassy [in London] relative to [a] Pacific Cable subsidy."<sup>5</sup>

Fleming used the Canadian Prime Minister's obvious initial interest in the project as a basis for an additional request that a British naval ship sail over the projected cable route to check for suitable harbours, ocean depths,

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 281, Fleming to Lorne, 7 July 1880.

<sup>2</sup>John A. Macdonald Papers, vol. 255, Fleming to Macdonald, 6 July 1880 (hereinafter cited as Macdonald Papers).

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Aikins to Galt, 23 July 1880; also contains Canadian Privy Council Reports of 17 June and 7 July.

<sup>4</sup>Macdonald was in London at this time to negotiate a Canadian Pacific Railway contract and to give evidence before The Royal Commission On The Defence Of British Possessions and Commerce Abroad.

<sup>5</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 26 July 1880.



and other unknown conditions.<sup>1</sup> Macdonald promptly acted, instructing Galt to confer with Lord Kimberley of the Colonial Office about using such a ship. Tupper informed Fleming of this action and added, "You can rely upon all the aid I can give you in any way."<sup>2</sup>

Fleming would need all the aid he could get, for the Colonial Office was less enthusiastic about the project. Lord Kimberley explained to Galt that the Foreign Office, the Post Office, and the Treasury must all be contacted before he would express an opinion on the idea. He added that the project could not possibly be implemented until the Canadian government obtained permission to land in the Aleutians from the United States. A cable landing in the Aleutians Kimberley saw as a most undesirable feature of the plan because it gave the Americans effective control over the cable.<sup>3</sup>

Tupper continued to be one of Fleming's most important links within the Canadian government. He informed Fleming that, while the members of the government were much interested in the scheme, Macdonald and Galt agreed that landing permission from Japan would be much preferred over

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Macdonald, 13 August 1880.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 26 August 1880.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Kimberley to Galt, 16 August 1880; and Fleming Papers, vol. 16, no. 116, Galt to Aikins, 18 August 1880.



ownership of an indefensible island. However, Tupper failed to agree with Kimberley's view that American landing permission should be obtained before Japan's permission. He maintained that the Americans were more likely to agree if Japan had already conceded such rights, and he intended to write a letter on this point for Galt to present to Kimberley.<sup>1</sup>

Also of concern to Tupper was the fact that, since the publication of Fleming's Report, Cyrus Field had begun again actively promoting a cable from San Francisco to Asia.<sup>2</sup> American commercial rivalry with Canada and later British and American rivalry in the Pacific area were destined to become major features of the Pacific cable question. Tupper emphasized the importance of the cable to Canada in a letter to Galt.

I may say that Sir John Macdonald, with whom I have discussed this matter, entirely concurs in the opinions above expressed. . . . I may add, in conclusion, that I find this question is attracting very general attention in this country; and that it seems to be regarded as one of great importance, both to Canada and the Empire.<sup>3</sup>

As an indication that, in fact, Macdonald did concur with Tupper, Macdonald wrote to Fleming in late August, "I shall get Galt to see Lord Kimberley in the matter of Japan and if necessary follow it up by a personal

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 19 August 1880.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Tupper to Galt, 20 August 1880.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*





visit.<sup>1</sup>

Among those attracted to Fleming's scheme was Erastus Wiman, the New York-based, Canadian-born capitalist with extensive investment in Canada including several telegraph companies. He had known Fleming for several years and expressed early interest in the Asiatic cable, which could have developed into a profitable investment and put his Great North-Western Telegraph Company in a very strong position as a key link in cable traffic to Asia. Wiman kept Fleming informed about any possible moves in the United States to form a competitive Pacific cable company. Since Cyrus Field was one of the most likely competitors, his activities were closely observed. In November, 1880, Wiman reported to Fleming, that while Field was leaving for an extensive tour of the Pacific area, he did not feel that any plans were in the offing for a Pacific cable.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming used Field's visit to Japan to portray the Canadian scheme as being endangered by the Americans.<sup>3</sup> He urged Galt, in a personal letter, to see if the Colonial Office would take immediate action to obtain a site in

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 27 August 1880.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 54, no. 374, Wiman to Fleming, 4 November 1880.

<sup>3</sup>In 1880 Field did make a request for a subsidy from the Japanese government, which they refused. Fleming, however, was not aware of this attempt.



Japan before the United States could obtain exclusive rights.<sup>1</sup> Galt again approached the Colonial Office about the matter.<sup>2</sup> Fleming similarly approached John A. Macdonald who had "been laid up for some days" but who said he would ask Tupper to attend to the matter.<sup>3</sup>

Governor General Lorne was approached by Fleming at the same time about a slightly different aspect of the project--a survey of the area of the Pacific crossed by the cable. This step was necessary before capital could be raised and investors attracted to the project. Since a private survey would be prohibitively expensive, Fleming sought to have the Canadian government request the use of a British ship from Esquimalt for the task.<sup>4</sup> The Minister of Public Works, Hector Langevin, to whom the matter was referred in the Privy Council, agreed with Fleming's views and believed ". . . the object to be one of much importance."<sup>5</sup> Galt, the Colonial Office, and the Admiralty were all informed shortly of this new request by the Canadian government on behalf

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Galt, 2 December 1880.

<sup>2</sup>C.O. 42/763, Galt to C.O., 2 December 1880.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 3 December 1880.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 30, no. 210, Fleming to Lorne, 4 December 1880.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, *Canadian Privy Council Report*, 8 December 1880.



of Fleming.<sup>1</sup>

The Colonial Office had eventually agreed with the conclusions of the Canadian Ministers that Japan should be approached for landing concessions prior to the United States and in late December successful negotiations to this end were reported to the Marquis of Lorne.<sup>2</sup> The only condition imposed by the Japanese government was control of the cable, which the Colonial Office and the British Charge d'Affaires in Japan felt was reasonable since the Japanese would then be responsible for its protection. Any suitable site on Yezo would be acceptable. This development was extremely fortunate for Fleming, since Galt had only a week earlier reported that Parkes in the Colonial Office had said, "The Japanese are suspicious and certainly will not act without seeing you."<sup>3</sup>

At once it became essential for Fleming to learn everything available regarding the Japanese telegraph system. From Galt, Fleming learned that only one cable, owned by a Danish firm, presently landed in Japan. This cable connected the Russian land system with the Japanese government-owned land lines. Fleming's Pacific cable would

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 42, Lorne to C.O., 8 December 1880.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 30, no. 210, Kimberley to Lorne, 18 December 1880; *Ibid.*, Lorne to Fleming, 21 December 1880.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Galt to Fleming, 19 December 1880.



connect with the Japanese land lines on Yezo and thus with the Danish cable at Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> Fleming was fortunate in that he only learned of the possible connections after the negotiations with the Japanese had already begun. Fleming had little personal knowledge of Japan, as had most people in Canada in 1880. Nor did Fleming even possess an accurate map of Japan--a detail which he sought to correct by contacting the British Legation in Washington.<sup>2</sup>

Seemingly the Pacific cable was nearing reality after the successful conclusion of the initial details. The next essential steps were to obtain landing rights in the Aleutians from the American government and to contact cable manufacturing firms for estimates of cost. Fleming had no reply on his request for a nautical survey, but he was hopeful that a survey could be made in the summer of 1881.<sup>3</sup> Since preparation of letters to the cable firms was the easier of the tasks, it was completed first. Fleming spent the Christmas holidays of 1880 preparing a "Memorandum in reference to the establishment of an Overland Telegraph through Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and a Submarine Line from Canada to Asia."<sup>4</sup> In this he borrowed

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 13, no. 91, Drummond to Fleming, 22 December 1880.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Galt, 23 December 1880.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 December 1880; also Fleming Papers, "Memorandum. . .," vol. 118, no. 33, 27 December 1880.





liberally from F. N. Gisborne's 1879 Report as well as his own 1880 Railway Report. He reiterated the progress made to date, the advantages of the scheme, and the necessity for early replies by the cable construction firms. The only major alteration in the scheme involved changing the Canadian landing point from the Queen Charlotte Islands to Quatsino on northern Vancouver Island. This change was caused by the western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway being relocated to Burrard Inlet from Port Simpson and no further progress being made beyond Edmonton in the Government telegraph line.<sup>1</sup>

Four firms--The India Rubber, Gutta Percha and Telegraph Works Company; W. T. Henley & Company Telegraph Works; The Telegraph Construction & Maintenance Company; and Siemens Brothers--were asked to submit cost estimates for 4,240 miles of cable.<sup>2</sup> All were British, this area of technology being one in which Britain enjoyed almost total world dominance. Ironically the charts of the North Pacific which accompanied the Memorandum were prepared by the United States government. British Admiralty information on the North Pacific at this time was limited, compared with that of American authorities with their interest in Alaska.

The acquisition of a landing concession in the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Galt, 28 December 1880.



Aleutians for the Canadian cable was perhaps more sensitive to suggest but was obtained by very crude but common methods in 1881--money and influence. Erastus Wiman informed Fleming in January that there would be no difficulty; he would see what his friends in Washington could do.<sup>1</sup> Among Wiman's friends was John Hay, Assistant Secretary of State, who, though disinclined to grant the privilege to a foreigner, would consider it if Wiman himself applied acting for Fleming.<sup>2</sup> Wiman then described the course of events:

I delayed pushing the matter until I could be well armed with strong letters from personal friends and influential telegraph people . . . I have employed a young man named Copeland as a sort of parliamentary agent to look after the matter and not let it slip.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming was invited to visit New York, as Wiman desired ". . . to bring you in contact with very influential parties . . . in relation to your Asiatic project."<sup>4</sup> Wiman also warned Fleming not to reveal any of the negotiations to Gisborne, probably due to Gisborne's position in relation to Wiman's telegraph holdings in Canada and due to Gisborne's own contacts among influential telegraph people in the United States. Gisborne was also an advocate of government owned telegraph systems similar to the British system, a

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 54, no. 374, Wiman to Fleming, 8 January 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 January 1881.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 January 1881.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



position Wiman could not favour.

The "agent" in Washington was able to report in early February that,

The Secretary of State [Ewart] has decided favorably on the Aleutian Island matter, and I presume that some of these days, in the course of red tape from the lazy cuss, you will be notified.<sup>1</sup>

The cost of the "agent" was \$50 to Fleming as well as deeper involvement with Wiman. This involvement with "American interests" would soon cause Fleming great difficulty in the Canadian Parliament where the railway debate caused all American connections to be suspect.

Two cable construction firms replied to Fleming's inquiry with opposite views regarding a Pacific cable. The first to reply--Admiral G. H. Richards, Director of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company--took an almost completely negative viewpoint. He disliked the clause allowing the Canadian government to repay the capital and take over the project.

We are of opinion that such a clause as this would raise grave difficulties in obtaining the capital in this country, even if there were no other obstacles in the way of the enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

Richards also felt that due to the importance of American business in Asia any such project should be a joint Canadian-American cable because there could not possibly be enough

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 11, no. 74, Copeland to Wiman, 14 February 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 41, no. 289, Richards to Fleming, 28 January 1881.





business for two Pacific cables.<sup>1</sup> It can be surmised that much of this pessimism was due in part to the close connection of his firm with the Eastern Telegraph interests seeking to block the scheme. A more positive reply came from Matthew Gray of the India Rubber, Gutta Percha and Telegraph Works Company; he offered to lay the cable for £1,400,000, provided that the nautical survey were completed.

Fleming appeared nearly ready to form a company in mid-February 1881. He had secured a promise of landing sites in Japan, the Aleutians, and Canada. He had established important contacts among the telegraph capitalists in New York. He had a firm cost estimate for laying the cable. Only two major steps remained--to get the route surveyed and to get approval of the 17 June 1880 Order-in-Council from the Canadian Parliament. With his strong connections in the Canadian Cabinet he never doubted that the latter would be anything but a formality. However, approval was not to be simple, or even possible, in the Parliament of 1880-1881.

As the session drew on, Fleming grew impatient for the government to introduce his cable bill. The first indication that things were not well came in a letter from the Department of Public Works, saying that Parliament would not be approached until a company or corporation had been formed. Langevin also stated that no reserve had been made in the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*



Canadian Pacific Railway contract for Fleming's telegraph wire. He would be expected to make these arrangements with the company himself.<sup>1</sup> Fleming saw this as an unfortunate oversight but not a serious problem.

Acting on the advice of A. T. Galt, Fleming decided to remain in Ottawa until his cable bill passed. Finally, he prevailed upon Langevin, extremely pressed with the business of the C.P.R. contract, to introduce the motion.<sup>2</sup> The resolution was to be considered on 1 March. As Fleming explained to Galt: "It is intended that a short Bill should follow giving the Government power to incorporate myself and five others under the Joint Stock Companies Act."<sup>3</sup> Once this part of the plan was accomplished Fleming would visit England and Japan to raise capital and see about the details of construction.

Hector Langevin described the debate on the Resolution in the House as ". . . an explosion of opinion on both sides of the House against the exclusive privilege for 20 years. . . ." <sup>4</sup> J. M. Currier announced in the House that

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 281, Public Works to Fleming, 10 February 1881.

<sup>2</sup>C.S.P., 1881, No. 41-2, pp. 18-19, Fleming to Langevin, 15 February 1881.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Galt, 18 February 1881.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 193, Langevin to Fleming, 1 March 1881.



his company--The European, American and Canadian Cable Company--was determined and able to build not only an Atlantic but a Pacific cable as well. As an act of good faith he offered to deposit \$750,000 as a guarantee.<sup>1</sup> The resolution was postponed. Langevin privately warned Fleming that if Currier put his offer in writing the earlier government resolution might be dropped instead of postponed.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming attempted to defend his position, for his entire work of the past year appeared threatened. He denied the charge that he planned merely to dispose of any concessions granted to him in New York or London. He asserted that, "as soon as I ceased to act as Engineer-in-Chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway, I took active steps to promote the undertaking, and since that date I have advanced it by all means in my limited power."<sup>3</sup> Fleming claimed his only aim was the completion of a cable

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<sup>1</sup>Canada, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 1880-1881, pp. 1152, 1410. Currier, an Ottawa businessman, sat as a Liberal Conservative in the House from 1867 to 1877, when he was forced to resign for having infringed the Independence of Parliament Act by conducting business dealings with the government while still a member. He won a by-election in May 1877 and re-entered the House.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 193, Langevin to Fleming, 1 March 1881.

<sup>3</sup>C.S.P., 1881, No. 41-2, pp. 19-20.



across the Pacific.

I am perfectly willing to furnish all the information I have obtained and to hand over the rights I have acquired, and to assist in every way in my power the consummation of a work fraught with so many advantages to Canada, to the Empire, and to the world.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming's Bill failed to gain acceptance in the House due to his American associations, his earlier connection with the Pacific Railway, his dependence upon the men in the Cabinet, and the presence of vocal interests of a rival cable plan.

George M. Grant, an old friend, wrote to Fleming of the incident in the House:

Today's papers have stirred me up, for I see that the stupids of the House are alarmed that Canada should have Cable lines independent of the U. States. They will do nothing themselves, nor let others do good; but they can obstruct & suspect. Verily, it is a hard thing to try & benefit the public.<sup>2</sup>

In the Senate Fleming attempted to re-establish his position with a "Memorandum Relating to the project of a SUB-MARINE TELEGRAPH between the Dominion of Canada and the continent of Asia."<sup>3</sup> It was submitted for the information of the Senate on 17 March 1881. With the aid of Senator C. F. Cornwall of British Columbia, Fleming managed to get all relevant documents and correspondence tabled to support his case.<sup>4</sup> It was to no avail, however, as the rival

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 18, no. 131, Grant to Fleming, 3 March 1881.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 118, no. 33, 17 March 1881.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 11, no. 74, Cornwall to Fleming, 18 March 1881; C.S.P., 1882, No. 41a.





European, American and Canadian Cable Company, instead of Fleming's company, received an act of incorporation a few hours before Parliament prorogued.<sup>1</sup> Fleming's indignation was apparent in his Diary where he recorded: "a good deal exercised about Asia (Pacific) Cable Bill & the injustice done me in allowing another party to cut the ground from under me by giving them an act of incorporation."<sup>2</sup>

Another blow had fallen during this same tense period regarding the request for an Admiralty survey of the proposed cable route. The Admiralty sent him a chart, showing soundings, primarily taken by United States' ships, and stating that they could only consider such a request for a survey if it were presented in precise detail. The note closed ominously with the comment that the Lords of the Admiralty held no immediate prospects for assistance, as the ships of the North Pacific Station were all on important duties.<sup>3</sup> The inertia of the Lords of the Admiralty was to become a negative force working against any movement toward a Canadian Pacific telegraph cable.

After the failure of his cable bill Fleming temporarily left Ottawa for New York, probably to seek advice from

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<sup>1</sup>Canada, *Parliamentary Debates* (Senate), 1880-1881, pp. 679, 698.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 21 March 1881.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 281, Public Works to Fleming, 4 March 1881; also Kimberley to Lorne, 25 January 1881; also Admiralty to C.O., 18 January 1881.



Erastus Wiman, who was still actively interested in the scheme. The terms of the United States' concession finally came through from the Department of State and were considered reasonable by both Wiman and Fleming. The conditions concerned rates, insured that competition would be provided for, that government messages would receive precedence and that American citizens had equal rights in the countries concerned.<sup>1</sup> One rather curious factor of the United States' position was, as explained by William M. Ewart, the Secretary of State, since there had never been any Congressional legislation covering cables, the President exercised complete executive authority. The concession of landing rights would be subject to his personal approval once a company was formed and incorporated.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming now could only wait and see if the rival cable company was able to make use of the privilege obtained from the Canadian Parliament. During this time Fleming began devoting more time to working, writing, and speaking on his idea of standard time and a universal prime meridian. Wiman in New York still had hopes of keeping the Canadian project alive and continued an active correspondence with Fleming. Much of his information concerned the titantic

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 54, no. 374, "Memorandum. Conditions required by the Government of the United States." Department of State, 5 March 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*; also Wiman to Fleming, 9 March 1881.



struggle underway for control of the domestic telegraph systems in the United States during the summer of 1881. Jay Gould, head of the Atlantic and Pacific system, as well as numerous smaller companies, was pouring vast sums of money into a struggle with the larger Western Union Telegraph Company in an effort to force a merger. Wiman wrote in April that he had hoped to see Gould about Fleming's cable scheme, but so far had been unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> He hoped that Gould might wish to become more involved in the cable business to provide outlets for his extensive domestic telegraph system.

Gould finally was reached by Wiman in early May and apparently expressed some interest in Pacific cable. Gould's associate, Dr. Green, was imbued with the idea of laying a cable to Alaska, but any such connection would have to begin from the United States to obtain their support.<sup>2</sup> The possibility of Canadian involvement in the cable scheme would have lessened considerably if events had developed in this direction. Fortunately perhaps for Fleming's scheme, Gould, who had been unable to come to terms with the Anglo-American Cable Company with its Atlantic cables, began to exert pressure on them by laying plans for his own system of Atlantic cables. In June Wiman suggested that Fleming attempt to gain control of the recently passed Canadian

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 April 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 May 1881.



charter. With this charter it might be possible to induce Gould to join if he could be made to believe that he needed it.<sup>1</sup> However, the eventual result was the creation in 1882 of a cable cartel which set Atlantic and domestic telegraph rates. This cartel temporarily ended the financial warfare in the telegraph circles in New York but had the effect of ending any immediate United States' desire for a Pacific cable. The domestic and Atlantic struggle had been too costly.

Cyrus Field fared no better than Fleming in his quest for a Pacific cable. Lord Kimberley reported that British officials had learned that Field had proposed a cable from the United States to Japan via the Sandwich Islands--if the Japanese were prepared to give a 20-year guarantee of revenue. The Japanese government refused the offer. They were prepared to extend only terms equal to those offered to Fleming and held by a Danish Cable Company since 1876: They would protect the cable and send messages via their land lines.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming was prepared to wait for a move from the rival company and devoted most of his seemingly limitless energy to the time question. He wrote to Galt that:

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 June 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 30, no. 210, Kimberley to Lorne, 27 April, 1881; also copy to Fleming 21 May 1881 (secret and confidential).





"I can only accept the situation and wait until the second company do nothing, which I think they are very likely to do."<sup>1</sup> He admitted that he had been careless in following the development of the rival company in Parliament:

So little did Senators know, that every one I spoke to afterwards who noticed that an Asiatic Tel. Bill was passing, thought they were seeing read the 3rd time the Bill in which I was interested.<sup>2</sup>

Sir John Rose repeatedly reassured Fleming from London in June that the chartered company had made no attempts to raise capital, had no worthwhile names connected, and would doubtless not amount to anything.<sup>3</sup>

During the summer Fleming became involved in a lengthy quarrel with F. N. Gisborne about who could properly claim the credit for conceiving the Canadian Pacific cable scheme. Gisborne expressed regret over the turn of events in the Commons and Senate, but said it was to be expected due to the mistakes made by Fleming.

You made a mistake . . . I did not strengthen your case by claiming the originality of the enterprise as personally your own conception, it being known to many of my friends, that I had first introduced it to your attention.<sup>4</sup>

This set off a bitter exchange of opinion with both men appealing to Sir Charles Tupper, who, as Minister of Railways

<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 19, no. 66, Fleming to Galt, 27 May 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 41, no. 297, Rose to Fleming, 23 June & 24 June 1881.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 20 June 1881.



and Canals, had worked with both men in 1879. Tupper supported Fleming's claim as the original projector of the cable to Asia. Regarding the "Memorandum to the Senate" of 17 March 1881, to which Gisborne took exception because he was ignored, Tupper says: "I have carefully read your memo. of the 17th March referred to, and believe it to be strictly accurate in every particular."<sup>1</sup> Tupper consulted his files and found no reference to a cable project on the part of Gisborne; whereas, he stated that Fleming had repeatedly pressed the point. It was because of this that Tupper allowed the ideas to be included in the 1880 Report even though he regarded them ". . . as of too sanguine a character."<sup>2</sup>

Once Tupper had firmly aligned himself with Fleming in the controversy, Gisborne was shrewd enough to placate Fleming. He wrote that, "I attach very little importance . . ." to the matter and would never have brought it up if it had not been for Fleming's Memorandum to the Senate to which some of Gisborne's friends took exception. Gisborne admitted that Fleming took the initiative in making the idea public and if,

. . . the scheme as set forth in your Pacific R. R. Report of 1880, was discussed with Sir Charles Tupper, prior to my arrival in Ottawa you were right in stating that it originated entirely with yourself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 24 June 1881.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 25 June 1881.



Gisborne maintained, however, that his letter of 30 June 1880 suggesting that concessions be sought from the Canadian government in the name of Pacific Telegraph Company, was ". . . the leading idea, as to the originality of the particular scheme adopted."<sup>1</sup> Gisborne claimed that he valued Fleming's friendship and would ". . . close this subject ad infinitum."<sup>2</sup>

The relations between Fleming and Gisborne continued to be formal and polite, but any further connection regarding a Pacific cable was impossible. When it was later discovered that Gisborne had given advice to the rival cable company, the argument flared anew. Fleming especially had a need to be given credit at this time since much of his work as Engineer-in-Chief of the Pacific Railway had been made useless by alterations in routes and construction techniques.

The Pacific cable dropped entirely from public attention during the fall and winter of 1881. Fleming, now totally involved in the Standard Time question, felt that nothing could be accomplished in regard to the cable in Ottawa until Parliament met in the spring. He accordingly left upon an extended tour of Europe and Britain. He also gradually increased his connection with the Hudson's Bay Company and with other engineering projects.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



Interest once again began building in political circles in Ottawa regarding an Asiatic cable in the spring of 1882. Hector Langevin agreed to speak for Fleming's cable ". . . when an opportunity arrives for saying a good word in the proper direction."<sup>1</sup> Wiman from New York assured Fleming that Sir E. J. Reid, one of the few prominent men whose name had appeared in connection with the rival American, Canadian, & Asiatic Cable Company, had never authorized his name to be used.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming made his initial move in Ottawa in February, in response to a conversation with John A. Macdonald in which: "You were good enough to say to me that I ought not to abandon the Asiatic Cable project."<sup>3</sup> He obviously was laying his plans more carefully than he had in the disastrous spring of 1881. In a lengthy letter to Macdonald he outlined the misfortunes that had befallen his previous bill in Parliament: "Everything seemed propitious until 1 March 1881 when hostility was met in the House of Commons which stopped further progress."<sup>4</sup> He recalled how private members succeeded in blocking the Government Resolution and had remained silent until the final hours of the final day

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Langevin to Fleming, 7 February 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 54, no. 374, Wiman to Fleming, 8 February 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 15 February 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*





of the session when they altered their first bill, appropriated some of the clauses of the government bill, and got it passed through both Houses. Fleming's attempt to counter with a printed Memorandum to the Senate was too late to be read. He wrote that, "The efforts which I made to promote telegraphic communication with Asia has been frustrated, and all progress stopped since the close of last Session."<sup>1</sup>

Fleming added that he never thought that with government approval he would lose his plan in the Canadian Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming emphasized that during the past year, he had investigated the rival company and found that at least one name, that of Reid, had been used without consent. In addition, the rival company had done nothing in a year. Fleming reminded Macdonald of a political debt in connection with the Pacific Railway investigation in an effort to induce him to limit or abolish the rival cable charter. As Fleming saw the situation:

You will remember that, as Chief Engineer, I had borne the burden and heat of the day in connection with the Pacific Railway, when a political exigency arose to exact a change of some sort in respect to the undertaking. However painful it was to me, I was called upon to sever my connection with that work, and in doing so, I was led to understand that I was serving the Government.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming wanted to make it very clear that his work on the Pacific cable had not been,

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.



. . . simply to make money out of the scheme. You will believe me when I say that throughout the whole term of my service as a public officer, money considerations have been of secondary importance.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming concluded with a plea that as the originator of the scheme he should be allowed to finish a project of such importance to Canada and the Empire.

Fleming's appeal to Macdonald did not go unheeded. Macdonald personally contacted Currier, the man instrumental in blocking Fleming's bill in the previous session.<sup>2</sup> Fleming, at the request of Langevin, went to great lengths to determine the status of the rival cable group. Through his contacts with Sir John Rose, Galt, and Wiman he received reports indicating that although the name of the company had been registered, it had no financial basis.<sup>3</sup> Wiman requested in return that Fleming should, ". . . do all you can in favor of the Montreal Telegraph Bill. I think it may hitch a little in the Senate."<sup>4</sup> Fleming either decided not to intervene or did not have enough influence to get Wiman's bill passed.

Notice was given on 20 March 1882 by Langevin of the government's intention to introduce a bill to provide Fleming

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 24 February 1882. Currier was appointed Postmaster of Ottawa and did not run in the 1882 election.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Langevin to Fleming, 27 February 1882; *Ibid.*, vol. 54, no. 374, Wiman to Fleming, 1 March 1882; *Ibid.*, 6 March 1882; *Ibid.*, 11 March 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 March 1882.



with an extended time period and exclusive privileges to land an Asiatic cable. Langevin acted completely in accord with Fleming's wishes:

Please send me a memo. containing the points upon which I shall speak relative to the other Company and in favor of yours; also in favor of exclusive privileges. Don't forget that some of the leading men mentioned last year as taking an interest in the other Company have since then repudiated such assent.<sup>1</sup>

The Fleming-Gisborne conflict flared up once again over the notice to give a new bill to Fleming. Fleming privately accused Gisborne of opposing the cable scheme for personal reasons. Gisborne denied these charges, saying he had explained his actions to Tupper's satisfaction. Moreover, the European, American, Canadian, & Asiatic Cable Company had provided Gisborne with a letter stating that he had had no interest in the Company while their bill had been pending in Parliament. Gisborne stated that if he had wished to oppose Fleming, he would have done so openly. Criticism of the new bill concluded his remarks:

I notice the reintroduction of your 20 year *monopoly* Bill, which I think, is a mistake, in the face of so strong a public sentiment versus monopolies & I think also that your object might have been better obtained in another way.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming felt it essential to counter the Parliamentary influence of Gisborne and his friends, apparently

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 192, Langevin to Fleming, 20 March 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 16, no. 120, Gisborne to Fleming, 25 March 1882.



headed by Senator R. W. Scott. He provided for Langevin's use all of the evidence he had acquired against the rival cable company. His aim was to show that no progress had been made in a year and that the company had only extended its charter to include a Pacific cable after the government bill was introduced. Fleming requested that the way be cleared to proceed with his original plan.<sup>1</sup>

Gisborne, despite all of his claims to the contrary, continued to actively oppose Fleming's project. He countered Fleming's evidence to Langevin with a letter of his own in which he said that the European, American, Canadian & Asiatic Cable Company had completed all arrangements and would imminently seek an interview with Galt to inform the Canadian government. Langevin wavered in his support of Fleming.<sup>2</sup> The government had no desire to support a bill which would appear to grant monopoly privileges in spite of the existence of another company.

The struggle for a cable bill in 1882 ended in compromise. The monopoly privilege and the twenty-year time limit were stricken from the government bill. Fleming was granted a one-year charter without exclusive privileges.<sup>3</sup> Fleming had attempted to make all of the facts in the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin, 14 April 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 April 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 May 1882.





situation known by getting all of the relevant correspondence and documents called into the Senate with the aid of Senator Alexander Vidal.<sup>1</sup> However, the opposition to Fleming's bill was too strong to prevent the major alterations which occurred. Much of this opposition was undoubtedly due to the atmosphere created by the release of the findings of the Royal Commission on the Canadian Pacific Railway which were in many instances critical of Fleming's actions as Engineer-in-Chief of the Pacific Railway. For the second time in two years developments in connection with the Railway worked against Fleming to limit or halt progress toward a Pacific cable.

The nature of the charges against Fleming by the Royal Commission hurt him deeply. In a personal letter to Macdonald, Fleming charged the Commission with "bias and incompetence." He claimed that much of what was said against him was due to the fact that "I declined to lend myself to party. . . ." He added that "if in the same position again, I would follow no other course."<sup>2</sup> Some of the bitterness expressed by Fleming also may have been caused by the Macdonald ministry's second failure to obtain a suitable cable charter. Fleming had resigned from a position of importance and responsibility in order to make things

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<sup>1</sup>C.S.P., 1882, No. 41a.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 1 May 1882.



politically easier for the Liberal-Conservative government. In return the government had failed in 1881 to pass his bill of incorporation after granting everything he asked in an Order-in-Council. He had more carefully prepared the way in 1882 only to have the bill altered into nearly unrecognizable form even though backed by the cabinet.

Fleming reluctantly accepted the limited nature of the concessions in the bill and left Ottawa to begin putting together the details of the project which had been dropped for nearly a year. While in the United States he renewed contacts with Erastus Wiman and called upon President Hayes, speaking on the Standard Time and Prime Meridian question. The cable and the time movement in this instance fit conveniently together. He also held conversations with Donald Smith and George Stephen about the cable project.<sup>1</sup>

The Egyptian crisis of June 1882 appeared to Fleming to be an opportune moment to again bring the Asiatic cable scheme to the attention of the British government. It appeared that the Red Sea telegraph might be cut at any moment, blocking communication to one-half of the Empire. Fleming pointed out to Macdonald that no matter what resulted in Egypt, ". . . it certainly points to the necessity of an independent means of communication with India, Australia, etc."<sup>2</sup> He recalled also that Macdonald had "always

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary 1882, 15 & 19 May; 9 June.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 13 June 1882.



viewed the scheme with favor, . . ." and hoped he would support the actions of a "special agent," Sir Hector Cameron, whom Fleming had engaged to present the scheme to the British government.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Hector Cameron, a Canadian M.P. with extensive business connections in Canada,<sup>2</sup> the United States, and London was a valuable ally. Cameron became enthused about the plan after initial conversations with a number of men, including Cornelius Van Horne and Russel Sage, all of whom felt that capital could be raised for the project. He informed Fleming that Stephen did not have time for the project, but that Richard Angus and Duncan McIntyre might possibly be induced to join.<sup>3</sup> There even appeared to be a possibility of \$50,000 from the United States government for a line extending to Alaska. Cameron felt that if one-half of the British government's cable business to Asia could be obtained, arrangements could easily be made with Western Union in the United States.<sup>4</sup> John Pender and other important cable men in London, all of whom Cameron knew, might cause some problems if they refused to cooperate and the capital had to be raised in spite of them. Cameron advised that the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>He was standing legal counsel for the Dominion Telegraph Company and the Union Telegraph Company. He also was a Director of numerous railways.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Fleming, July 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 July 1882.



new British government and the state of the current financial market suggested that little could be accomplished in 1882 other than prepare the way for the project. Once Cameron had familiarized himself with the scheme he proposed a financial arrangement with Fleming:

You & I to be equally interested in all profit and advantage to be derived from the scheme and . . . each to use our best exertions for its success . . . you may rely on my most zealous exertions for success as I take a warm interest in the profit.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming accepted this proposal.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian government gave Fleming's "special agent" full support in bringing the project to the attention of Her Majesty's Government. Langevin recommended Fleming, in a Report to the Privy Council, as a man of respectability, responsibility and integrity to carry out such a scheme. This Report was forwarded to London for consideration on the basis of the Egyptian crisis, the bill passed by the Canadian Parliament, and the importance of such a cable to imperial commerce and defense.<sup>3</sup> Hector Cameron reported that, ". . . it is everything we could wish."<sup>4</sup> Fleming had thoroughly prepared the groundwork for this step. In addition to personally seeing Macdonald and Langevin, his Diary records visits to Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley, Minister of

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Cameron, 12 July 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 22, no. 155, Canadian Privy Council Report, 26 July 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Fleming, 22 July 1882.





Finance, John H. Pope, Minister of Agriculture, Sir Alexander Campbell, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Sir Charles Tupper, Minister of Railways and Canals, "& others."<sup>1</sup> Since his resignation from the government service, Sandford Fleming had become extremely influential and adept at dealing with the highest levels of Canadian government and business leaders.

Erastus Wiman appreciated Fleming's potential to use influence on behalf of Wiman's numerous Canadian financial enterprises.<sup>2</sup> He took active steps to aid Fleming's cable project whenever he could; for example, he provided Hector Cameron with ". . . first rate introductions to Western Union Agents in England."<sup>3</sup> It was Wiman who also discovered that the European, Canadian, American & Asiatic Cable Company claimed to have contracted with Benjamin Batson to pay \$30,000 to:

. . . cover the cost of obtaining the Act of Parliament. This extraordinary statement so freely circulated throughout England is hardly calculated to convey to the Mother Country a very favorable impression regarding the purity of the Parliament of Canada.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 19, 20, and 21 July 1882.

<sup>2</sup>Erastus Wiman was by now involved with the Great North Western Telegraph Co. of Canada, as well as the Montreal, Dominion, and Manitoba Telegraph Companies.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 54, no. 374, Wiman to Fleming, 26 July 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 July & 9 Aug. 1882. Although Fleming used influence and personal contacts extensively, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever resorted to monetary rewards to achieve his desired aims, possibly explaining in part some of the difficulty he experienced in the 1881 and 1882 Canadian Parliamentary Sessions.



Wiman was convinced that Gisborne, still head of the Canadian Telegraph Service, was responsible for much of the opposition to Fleming's scheme. Wiman informed Fleming that the facts about Gisborne had been made public, insinuating that Gisborne was connected with the £6,000 paid for the Act of Parliament. "He is a first class fraud and a fool and you ought to have known it."<sup>1</sup> These allegations evoked the reply from Fleming that of necessity at least polite relations must be maintained with Gisborne due to his connections in Parliament. Wiman replied, "I am very glad to have your explanations regarding Gisborne, which relieve me from the thought that you are not sufficiently impressed with his utter unreliability."<sup>2</sup> Although Gisborne continued to oppose Fleming's plans whenever possible, open hostility never again appeared.

Hector Cameron timed his visit to London to coincide with the arrival at the Colonial Office of the Canadian Order-in-Council concerning the Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> John A. Macdonald had warned Cameron that his reception might be somewhat cool as relations with Lord Kimberley were strained at the moment. In fact, relations had never been good between the new Liberal British government and the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Wiman to Fleming,  
9 August 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 September 1882.

<sup>3</sup>C.O. 42/772, Lorne to C.O., 5 August 1882.



Conservative Canadian government. However, Macdonald added, "If you think of any way that I can be of use to you or Fleming cable me and I will write."<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Tupper was also to be in England at this time, and he informed Fleming that if he could be of any use while in London it would afford him much pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Macdonald's warning, Hector Cameron was warmly received by Lord Kimberley at the Colonial Office on 11 August when they met for an interview concerning the cable to Asia. Cameron's summary of the interview stressed several important points which made the outlook more optimistic. These points were the fact that the Colonial Office viewed an Asiatic cable as a desirable alternative to existing telegraph routes to India and Australasia; the fact that the security of existing lines of communication currently was being studied; and, perhaps most important of all, that the Colonial Office was interested in what the scheme's proponents desired from the government.

Cameron informed Lord Kimberley that a subsidy to be taken out of the revenue of government messages would interest private capitalists in the scheme. Kimberley was reassured by Cameron that there was little danger of mid-ocean destruction of such a cable in wartime due to the supremacy

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 7, no. 49, Macdonald to Cameron, 3 August 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 45, no. 311, Schreiber to Fleming, 8 August 1882.



of the British Navy. Canadian Sessional Papers, 41-1881 and 41a-1882 were left with Kimberley as a source of information and a demonstration of the scheme's acceptance by the Government of Canada. Kimberley promised, before the interview ended, to submit the idea to the government if Cameron and Fleming would submit a written memorial of what they would require. He did, however, caution that the Treasury might not favour a subsidy for an alternate telegraph cable since many areas of the Empire were still without cable communication.<sup>1</sup>

The requested "Memorial in reference to the scheme of Mr. Sandford Fleming, C.M.G., late Chief Engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railway, in reference to the construction of a line of Sub-Marine Electric Telegraph between the Pacific Coast of Canada and Japan and Asia,"<sup>2</sup> was presented to Kimberley's Secretary, R. G. W. Herbert, on 13 September.<sup>3</sup> Cameron was accompanied by Tupper, who, according to Cameron, ". . . has taken a warm interest in this matter in connection with the Canadian Pacific Railway."<sup>4</sup>

Fleming had outlined in the "Memorial" the steps taken

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Fleming, August 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 118, no. 33; also vol. 5, no. 49.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 5, no. 49, Cameron to Herbert, 13 September 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Kimberley, 29 August 1882; also C.O. 42/772, Cameron to C.O., 29 August 1882.





thus far to secure a Pacific cable. He stressed the weakness and unreliability of existing cables as well as their extreme importance to the Empire. He pointed out that the only present alternative route to Asia, India, and Australasia lay through Russia, an undesirable state of affairs in event of "political complication" arising in any one of the states through which the telegraph passed. The Pacific route would ". . . complete the electric girdle around the world . . ." and would be free of many of the dangers threatening existing cables. Fleming proposed that the British government grant a subsidy in the form of a guarantee to an amount equal to the interest on the capital invested. Britain in return would have secure communication to the eastern Empire and free messages amounting to the total annual subsidy. Fleming's request was in accord with existing British policy of heavily subsidizing strategically vital cable communication.<sup>1</sup>

Cameron followed up the presentation of the "Memorial" to the Colonial Office with a visit to Inosi Arinosi, the Japanese Minister in London. A subsidy was requested from the Japanese government. This request was supported by copies of all documents presented to the Colonial Office. Arinosi replied that Japanese interest in the cable was slight because they did little business with Europe, however,

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 118, no. 33, "Memorial . . . ," August 1882.



the matter would be brought to the attention of his government if Great Britain granted a subsidy.<sup>1</sup>

To Cameron and Fleming the London visit had been a success. The interview with Kimberley had gone well despite Macdonald's warning. Cameron felt that his warm reception had been due to a personal letter concerning the cable from Lord Lorne to Kimberley. Kimberley's promise to bring the matter to the attention of the government certainly had been the best reaction to be wished. Before leaving London, Cameron had engaged an agent to handle any inquiries, and Staff Commander Hull, R.N. Retired, to prepare a set of charts showing the latest soundings along the projected cable routes. For seven years prior to retirement Hull had been Superintendent of Charts at the Admiralty. Herbert of the Colonial Office and Sir John Rose of The City had both been personally contacted to press the cable matter in their respective areas. In regard to finance, Cameron had concluded after conversations with competent City men including Rose, ". . . that without a subsidy equal to about 5 p.c. on the cost, the money could not be obtained to lay the cable."<sup>2</sup>

Uncharacteristically the British Lords of the Treasury reacted promptly on the subsidy request. The reply,

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Fleming, 14 September 1882; also Cameron to Arinosi, 15 September 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Cameron to Fleming, 14 September 1882.



however, was quite in line with usual action, "No Imperial subsidy can be granted."<sup>1</sup> Fleming and Cameron continued promoting interest in the idea wherever possible. For example, at Fleming's request Sir Garnet Wolseley was informed of the scheme. His reply was enthusiastic:

I am one of those who attach the utmost importance to his proposal . . . Indeed the more the Ocean telegraphic system is completed the better for us. Every new cable laid adds strength to us as a great Naval power.<sup>2</sup>

Wolseley offered, through Sir John Rose, to aid Fleming in any way.<sup>3</sup>

Positive reactions like Wolseley's, combined with the Canadian government's continued interest, led Fleming to continue pressing for a Pacific cable. John A. Macdonald continued to be especially encouraging about the project, as indicated by a letter to Sir John Rose regarding a visit by "Our friend Fleming" to London to attempt to obtain funds from the British government.

The importance to Imperial as well as to Canadian interests of having a cable altogether through British territory . . . must be very obvious . . . As the other Asiatic cable scheme has broken down hopelessly, the Canadian legislature will I think be prepared next session, in February, to give Fleming's enterprise a monopoly for a number of years.<sup>4</sup>

Macdonald suggested that Rose should see Lord Rosebery about

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 42/773, Treasury to C.O., 4 October 1882.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 41, no. 297, Wolseley to Rose, 28 November 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Rose, 11 October 1882.



the scheme as he ". . . might interest himself in the matter, both with Her Majesty's Government & within the Rothschilds."<sup>1</sup>

Fleming spent the fall of 1882 in London describing it as ". . . surely the Queen City of the World."<sup>2</sup> His time in London was divided equally between attending to Hudson's Bay Company business and working for his Pacific cable scheme. With the rejection of a subsidy by the British Treasury, it had become apparent that Fleming would have to seek an arrangement with the monopolistic Eastern Telegraph Company headed by Sir John Pender. Toward this end, Fleming approached Pender through Sir John Rose, requesting Pender to, ". . . take a favorable view of the project . . . and to give it the weight of your influence."<sup>3</sup> This led to a series of dinners and meetings at which the two men discussed the project and at which Fleming was introduced to numerous prominent English politicians including Lord Derby.

Eastern Telegraph had nothing to gain and a monopoly to lose should Fleming succeed in creating a Pacific cable. Their position was clearly stated by Sir James Anderson in a letter to Fleming--a letter hostile to the plan in both tone and conclusion. Fleming wrote to Pender: "I greatly regret this as my object has been to enlist all interests in

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 16 November 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 38, no. 273, Fleming to Pender, 4 November 1882.





a work of the utmost public importance."<sup>1</sup> Fleming further stated that he had come to London with a desire to establish the project in cooperation with the Eastern Telegraph interests as ". . . such a course would be to the advantage of all."<sup>2</sup> Eastern officials attempted to convince the public that Fleming's plan was impossible because the North Pacific Ocean floor was supposedly deep and rugged. Fleming had difficulty countering this argument, for little was known of this area other than a few scattered depth soundings. Fleming's assumption that the Pacific simulated the Atlantic in the same latitude was rejected by the scheme's critics.

Thus Fleming was forced to try to prove that his project was feasible. Once it became clear that the meetings with the Eastern Telegraph Directors had failed, Dr. John Rae, the famous Arctic explorer and a friend of Fleming's, used his acquaintance with numerous current and retired British Naval officers to promote Fleming's scheme.<sup>3</sup> Fleming hoped to influence the Admiralty to survey the North Pacific. At Rae's home Fleming met Admiral G. H. Richards, R.N. Retired--once the Admiralty Hydrographer--and Admiral

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 18 November to 10 December, 1882.



Mayne, Hydrographer for the Admiralty.<sup>1</sup> Due to his position Mayne could not express an opinion publicly on the survey. On the other hand, Richards estimated that a six-month survey of the type needed to determine the feasibility of a Pacific Cable would cost £5,000. Richards informed Fleming that eventually a Pacific cable would be laid but financial rivalry and physical difficulties of the Pacific Ocean would delay it for some years. Both men assured Fleming that the only proper course to be followed was that the Canadian government request the Admiralty to survey the Pacific.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rae, who had taken part in the discussions regarding the cable, personally believed that it would not be possible until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming sailed for Canada shortly before Christmas, determined to influence the Canadian government to request an Admiralty survey of the North Pacific. In a letter to Macdonald he outlined the objections he had encountered in London. To his own voice he added the opinions of Richards and Commander Hull to prove that a survey would end doubt

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<sup>1</sup> Richards had once been in command of a survey of Vancouver Island and the British Columbia Coast. In 1882 he was managing Director of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company, a firm owned in part by the people who directed the Eastern Telegraph Company and its associated companies.

<sup>2</sup> Fleming Papers, vol. 41, no. 289, Richards to Fleming, 28 November & 29 November 1882.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 40, no. 284, Rae to Fleming, 3 December 1882.



about the feasibility of the project. The appeal closed with a request that the Canadian government contact the Admiralty.<sup>1</sup> Macdonald was not well during the Christmas season, and Fleming was forced to repeat his request personally to Langevin before obtaining a promise of action.<sup>2</sup>

Unknown to Fleming, in January, 1883, the British Admiralty with customary dispatch had finally decided on Cameron's survey request made in conjunction with his August conversations with Lord Kimberley. It had been decided that the cost of such a survey would be too high, considering that the ". . . general conditions of the scheme are in their present immature state."<sup>3</sup> The Admiralty also suggested that the United States be contacted for information regarding the depths in the North Pacific.

The Canadian government was unaware of the Admiralty's negative decision on 29 January when an Order-in-Council was sent to the Colonial Office requesting a survey. The Canadian request was based upon a report to the Council by Langevin recounting the importance of the cable as well as the objections encountered in London by Fleming.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 23 December 1882.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 11 January 1883.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 281, Public Works to Fleming, 9 March 1883; also C.O. 42/773, Admiralty to C.O., 1 January 1883.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 39, no. 281, Public Works to Fleming, 10 February 1883; also "Report . . .," 24 January 1883.



new request and the Admiralty refusal passed in mid-Atlantic as the Colonial Office finally sent it on to the Governor General.<sup>1</sup>

The Admiralty promptly answered the January request for a survey by forwarding a copy of the first refusal. It was argued that the Canadian government had presented nothing which would cause them to deviate from their 11 January decision ". . . that they are not prepared to divert a surveying vessel."<sup>2</sup> In London A. T. Galt recommended after conversations with the Earl of Derby, Gladstone's Colonial Secretary, and interviews with Admiralty officials that Fleming should ". . . thoroughly exhaust the existing sources of information before approaching the Admiralty."<sup>3</sup> He was informed that they might grant a "reasonable" request if they were promised financial assistance by the Canadian government.<sup>4</sup>

Admiralty opposition, opposition from the Treasury, a degree of opposition within the Canadian Parliament, as well as the continued opposition of the Eastern Telegraph Companies all worked to confound Fleming's scheme for a

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 281, Public Works to Fleming, 9 March 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 30, no. 210, Derby to Lorne, 27 March 1883.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Galt to Canada, Sec. of State, 29 March 1883.





Pacific cable. Fleming was fifty-six years old in January and remarked at the time, "This seems a great age & awakens me to the fact that I am no longer a young man, I cannot say I feel age however."<sup>1</sup> Four days later Macdonald turned sixty-eight and a "Grand party" was held. Fleming's business interests now took much of his time. He had been a Hudson's Bay Company Director for two years and in February 1883 invested heavily in C.P.R. stock.<sup>2</sup> As the Canadian Pacific Railway progressed, its direction, and the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company in the West, were largely in the hands of the same group of men. This business took great amounts of time and promised much more immediate financial rewards than the Pacific cable project, which appeared to meet obstacles at every turn.

The question of the survey once again, however, attracted Fleming's attention in May of 1883 after a letter was received by Cameron from Admiral Mayne. He was highly critical of the way Cameron and Fleming had presented the project when in London. He stated,

. . . that the whole tone of the Document was inadmissible: that it tried to make out that a Pacific Cable would be of vast *Imperial* interest, while comparatively speaking at any rate, of small interest to Canada! That Canada would however make no objection to the scheme, and that the Imperial Govt ought to be grateful for being told its duty!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 7 January 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 February 1883.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Mayne to Cameron, 12 May 1883.



Mayne said that the Canadian government appeared to be promoting a private commercial venture that it was unwilling to aid financially. The Canadian government should have offered to contribute at least one-half the cost of a survey. Mayne remarked that it was unfortunate that a different course of action had not been followed earlier. "As it happened I met Fleming, and found him with his head well into the Lion's mouth!"<sup>1</sup>

Fleming responded with a plan that was similar to that suggested by Mayne but not based upon his advice. Fleming requested that the Canadian government make \$10,000 to \$15,000 available to the Admiralty for the survey, to be refunded by Fleming's company once the cable was completed.<sup>2</sup> Macdonald had other more pressing places to use public funds than in surveys of the Pacific for private cable companies. At this same time Hector Cameron moved to dissociate himself from financial involvement in the project, possibly fearing that Fleming might be considering requesting private contributions for a survey. He informed Fleming that,

. . . I, of course, told Mayne that I represented you in the matter and that you had sent me to England about it when you could not go yourself, and that beyond acting

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 12 May 1883.



for you and wishing as a public matter to see the scheme carried through I had no interest in it.<sup>1</sup>

This represented quite a change from Cameron's position nine months earlier when he proposed to "be equally interested in all profit" and admitted that he took ". . . a warm interest in the profit."<sup>2</sup> Cameron stated that he still would do whatever he could for Fleming and would bring Fleming's latest idea--a conference of all interested colonies and the British government to see about subsidies--to the attention of the Canadian government. Langevin later expressed interest in the idea and said it would be brought before the Council.<sup>3</sup> Nothing emerged from the idea.

The Canadian government during the years 1883 to 1885 continued to press the work of the Canadian Pacific Railway--a line of communication vital to the physical unification of Canada. Regarding international communications, the members of the government continued to demonstrate the same interest which they had shown in Fleming's project. Sir Charles Tupper, with Major Cameron as his Secretary, attended an international Cable Conference in Paris as the Canadian Representative in October of 1883. Although Canada had relatively few miles of cables under its control, it demonstrated to the British government the increasing interest

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 49, Cameron to Fleming, 28 May 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 July 1882.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 May 1883.



Canadians had in world affairs. Tupper's conference report submitted to Macdonald stressed the fact that he was proud to represent Canada at an international conference on an equal footing with other nations of the world.<sup>1</sup> While in England following the Paris conference Tupper discussed the Pacific cable with interested people and came to the same conclusion as had Fleming: while the other colonies may fairly be asked to join in supporting the cable, Canada must make the first step in offering to incur part of the expenses in order to accomplish anything.<sup>2</sup> The year 1884 was entirely occupied with the Canadian Pacific Railway and with the mild recession affecting the Canadian economy. It was an unproductive year in Parliament generally, and especially so in regard to an extension of communication facilities.

The first four years of the attempt to create a Canadian Pacific cable can be recorded as a failure. The promising start made by Sandford Fleming withered under the continued opposition of British government offices still not fully aroused to the importance of communication in administering and holding the Empire together. Wholehearted Canadian support and aid did not serve to convince the British authorities. The Pacific cable in this period was seen as

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Charles Tupper, vol. 5, Tupper to Macdonald, 30 October 1883 (hereinafter cited as Tupper Papers).

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 14 November 1883.





a continuation of Canadian expansion and certainly was a product of the same enthusiasm for grand projects which marked the opening of the West.

Sandford Fleming was financially comfortable at the time of his retirement from the service of the Dominion government. His subsequent investment in the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway, as well as numerous smaller railways, was to make him a wealthy man by the standards of the day. Voluntarily he worked for projects which would have a broader importance to the world. He succeeded in his quest for a Prime Meridian and Standard Time; initially he failed in his quest for a Pacific cable. However, he gave considerable time to both projects as well as numerous other public organizations in which he was involved. Although the Asiatic cable scheme initially failed, in working for it Fleming developed techniques of popularizing ideas that he would later use with increasing success in a variety of other projects.

Another significant factor apparent in the first attempt to promote a Pacific cable was the opposition of the Eastern Telegraph Company and the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. These groups were watchful for a threat to the monopolistic position they held in cable communication in the Empire. They were prepared to match step for step any energy and money laid out in an attempt to promote a cable across the Pacific. They aimed to oppose the idea at every level from the public press to the major British



government offices. The earlier failure of Fleming's conception is also the story of their successful use of influence. Every future episode in the cable story contains a segment on the opposition of these interests. Until Fleming learned to utilize and mould public opinion they continued to defeat him.

Dr. Rae's prediction that a Pacific cable would not be a fact until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway proved accurate. In fact, the cable project lay dormant for several years before conditions once again seemed favourable for its reintroduction. Earlier attempts to initiate the scheme had established its ultimate importance. Fleming and the members of Macdonald's cabinet believed that the cable project must await the proper time, after the completion of projects of more immediacy to Canada. Happily this wait also coincided with the growth of imperial sentiment and the desire in the Dominion for closer connections with Great Britain. The cable, as a part of the most rapid means of communication available at the time, had the potential to serve a vital function in bringing about closer imperial ties.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PACIFIC TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Sandford Fleming's desire for activity was achieved in various ways during 1883 and 1884. He spent the fall of 1883 in London dealing with the Hudson's Bay Company business, followed by an arduous journey through the Selkirk Mountains at the request of the Canadian Pacific Railway to confirm the practicality of the Rogers Pass route to the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Fleming's subsequent assumption of a place on the Canadian Pacific Railway's Board of Directors<sup>2</sup> in conjunction with his Hudson's Bay Company responsibilities made great demands on his time.

Whenever possible, however, he continued to work on his own private projects. He served as the Canadian delegate to the International Prime Meridian Conference held in Washington<sup>3</sup> where he saw the success of his earlier movement to have Greenwich adopted as the world Prime Meridian. A resolution was also passed at this Conference recommending

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<sup>1</sup>Details of these travels and explorations are related in: Sandford Fleming, *From Old To New Westminster* (London: 1884).

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 8 May 1884.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 194, Canada, Dept. of State to Fleming, 9 June 1884.



universal Standard Time.<sup>1</sup> This Conference was followed immediately by a period of intensive work on the St. Lawrence Bridge project.<sup>2</sup>

It was well into the year 1885, after a lapse of over two years, before Fleming once more brought the Pacific cable project to the attention of the Canadian government. The successful suppression of the North-West Rebellion and the near completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway provided a time favourable for government consideration of projects of an important but less urgent nature. In early September, 1885, Fleming had a long chat with John A. Macdonald "on all subjects" including the Asiatic cable.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming now was on the Boards of Directors of several railways owned by the Canadian Pacific, including the newly acquired North Shore Railway.<sup>4</sup> He had completed most of the earlier projects and had the time to devote to his Pacific cable scheme. The Pacific cable projected by Fleming in 1885 had been altered considerably since his initial proposal. Fleming's current project was for a cable to Australia and New Zealand. It was apparently prompted largely as a result of Fleming's meeting in the summer of 1885 with Owen Jones, a New Zealand businessman and promoter

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 13 to 29 October 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, November 1884.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 September 1885.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 September 1885.





on a tour of Canada. The two men became immediate friends and shortly associated in the new cable venture, which in response to the growing imperialist feelings in all parts of the Empire, would stress the importance of linking the great units of the Empire with physical bonds of submarine cables for communication.

Owen Jones held conversations with Macdonald, Van Horne, and others and, when in London, met Tupper and Tilley.<sup>1</sup> He apparently was impressed with the interest which these men showed in improving relations with New Zealand. During a train trip to Halifax from Montreal in early October, Fleming and Jones worked out the rough details of the new plan.<sup>2</sup> This was followed with a report on the status of the past scheme for Macdonald. In this report Fleming reminded Macdonald,

You are aware that through various causes these efforts proved unsuccessful, but the time which has elapsed has in no way lessened the importance of the project, or rendered it more difficult of accomplishment.<sup>3</sup>

The C.P.R. telegraph was soon to be completed to British Columbia and the C.P.R. would be negotiating with one of the Atlantic cable companies to provide low rates to Britain. Only the Pacific cable remained to connect "telegraphically all the great British possessions, in every quarter

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 28 August 1885.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 8 October 1885.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 15 October 1885.



of the globe, without passing through Europe."<sup>1</sup> Fleming now felt that because the ". . . submarine telegraph is better understood . . ." a direct line from British Columbia to Australasia was possible; in fact it had many political and commercial advantages for Canada over the former route. If Macdonald would contact the other governments concerned about subsidies for a number of years Fleming felt the cable would soon be a reality.<sup>2</sup>

A week later, following a dinner party at Macdonald's at which the cable project must have been discussed, Fleming presented a more detailed revision of his earlier letter to Macdonald.<sup>3</sup> In this letter he projected a cable touching at the Sandwich Islands, Fiji, and then Australia and New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> Macdonald was interested, but a week later he informed Tupper that the Pacific cable matter could not be brought before the Council until the Riel matter was concluded.<sup>5</sup> Assured that the Riel situation could not last long, Fleming wrote to Owen Jones in London requesting that he act as Fleming's agent in the matter of the Pacific cable. Fleming was in Winnipeg on November 15th, returning from the 7 November last spike ceremony at Craigellachie, when

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 19 October 1885.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 20 no. 67, Fleming to Macdonald, 20 October 1885.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 27 October 1885.



Riel was executed. He recorded the fact with some relief in his Diary. On his return to Montreal Fleming began to press the Pacific cable matter with Tupper and Owen Jones in London.<sup>1</sup> Tupper had offered to be of any possible assistance to Owen Jones ". . . as representing your interests in the matter in this country."<sup>2</sup> John A. Macdonald also took personal interest in the cable by requesting Admiral Mayne to call on Tupper to discuss the cable.<sup>3</sup>

From late January 1886 Owen Jones devoted his full time to the cable project. He also interested his brother-in-law, Admiral Shortland, in the project. Jones was intent on completing a British cable before the "yankees" could complete one in the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> Fleming's promotional work in Canada on behalf of the cable produced other influential supporters such as Cornelius Van Horne. He wrote to Tupper stressing the importance of an all-British cable:

The ease with which the present telegraph connections between England and India and Australia can be broken in case of war should make a Pacific cable project a matter of lively interest to the Imperial Government.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 27 November 1885.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 18 December 1885.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Macdonald to Tupper, 30 December 1885.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 29 January 1886.

<sup>5</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Van Horne to Tupper, 17 February 1886.



Although Sandford Fleming had taken the initiative in promoting a Pacific cable in Canada and among Canadians, other men within the Empire and in the United States saw the importance of having the first cable connection in the Pacific:

I need not dilate to you upon the honor and profit of being pioneer in closing the only remaining gap in the telegraph circuit of the Globe. Once as far as the Sandwich Islands, Fiji, and Australia fall naturally in the way and the thing is done. Furthermore, the first in the field will hold it against all comers.<sup>1</sup>

The most serious competitor for Fleming was Randolph C. Want, the London solicitor for New South Wales, who was from New South Wales. While Fleming was promoting a cable in Canada and London, Want had been working to the same end in Australia, Hawaii, and the United States.<sup>2</sup> When the story of Want's efforts made the front page of the *Toronto Globe*,<sup>3</sup> Macdonald wrote to Tupper in London to obtain information on Want. Tupper replied that as yet Want had formed no syndicate, had had no success getting a subsidy from Australia, Hawaii, or the United States, and that he would probably approach the Canadian government and the C.P.R.<sup>4</sup> Fleming made the same request of Tupper a few days

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 42/786, Kersey to Tupper, 1 June 1886.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Van Horne to Tupper, 17 February 1886; (enclosure) "A New Cable Line," *Chronicle* (San Francisco), 25 January 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Globe* (Toronto), 28 January 1886, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Tupper to Macdonald, 19 February 1886.





later and received a copy of the letter to Macdonald as a reply.<sup>1</sup>

Another potential competitor of Fleming's was Herbert Heaton of Tasmania, now a British M.P., who also was interested in promoting a cable to the United States. Heaton had already taken the initiative and contacted Fleming about the Canadian plans.<sup>2</sup> Taking the initiative, since the area seemed filled with potential competitors, Fleming traveled to New York to meet Randolph Want and his associate Sir Alexander Stuart.<sup>3</sup> He returned with them to Canada where through Fleming they held conversations with Lord Lansdowne and then talks with the C.P.R. Board of Directors.<sup>4</sup> The C.P.R., while not interested in financing a cable in the Pacific, wanted to see one laid to provide increased business for their own land telegraph lines. To this end, they produced a *Memorandum--Cable to Australia*,<sup>5</sup> outlining the advantages and need for such a cable.

Fleming and Jones attempted to induce Want and his associates, then including Heaton, to drop their interest in

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 26 February 1886; (enclosure) Tupper to Macdonald, 19 February 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 22, no. 153, Heaton to Fleming, 11 March 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 16 March 1886.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 March to 6 April 1886.

<sup>5</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, *Memorandum--Cable to Australis*, 15 March 1886.



a cable starting from San Francisco as proposed by the Mackay-Bennett Cable Company of New York in favour of an all British cable running from British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> Fleming felt that if the colonial advocates worked against each other the United States would be the major beneficiary. Other men interested in closer imperial ties such as George Baden-Powell offered assistance to the Canadian plan in the British Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The apparent competition finally induced Earl Granville, the Colonial Secretary, to address a letter to all Australian and New Zealand Agents General, asking if the recent proposal made in the United States had the support of their governments and if it would not be better to consider a cable to Canada since the Canadian Pacific Railway was now complete.<sup>3</sup>

As a direct result of the conversations with the Australians, the C.P.R. interest in the cable, and the inquiry of the Colonial Office, Fleming produced a memorandum (his favorite form of operation when promoting an issue) entitled *Canadian and Australian Cable*.<sup>4</sup> This public statement stressed Fleming's involvement with this idea since October 1885 when he had discussed the issue with Macdonald.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 11 March 1886.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Baden-Powell to Tupper, 22 March 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Granville to High Commissioner, 30 March 1886.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming, *Canadian and Australian Cable*, 6 April 1886.



Since that time the completion of the C.P.R. and its subsequent arrangements with the United States and with the Atlantic cable companies made it available to serve a Pacific cable. He stressed that despite the high tariff per word on messages to Australia, traffic had increased by 12-1/2 per cent per year since the first cable was opened in August 1872. By taking advantage of the C.P.R.'s more direct, politically more stable connection, messages would be able to be sent to Australia for one-half the existing tariff or 4/ per word. Some had recommended that Canada should act first in providing a subsidy, but Canada had already done a great deal to provide a vital link in imperial communications in the Canadian Pacific Railway. What was needed was a subsidy from the British government to aid this important work.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming had the written assurance of the C.P.R. prior to releasing his memorandum that it would offer every facility to a Pacific cable. Van Horne had said that they were prepared to send messages across Canada for not more than 5 cents a word. As soon as Fleming's company could be organized, the C.P.R. Board of Directors would be prepared to enter into a formal contract on this basis.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Fleming himself was a Director gave him a great advantage over anyone else who would seek to come to an agreement with the C.P.R. for the use of its telegraph facilities.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 354, Van Horne to Fleming, 6 April 1886.



Fleming's C.P.R. concession forced all British advocates to in some way accommodate him in their plans.

Want and Fleming in the spring of 1886 came to a tentative agreement not to compete, but agreed rather to pool their efforts and resources in connection with a Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup> Fleming wasted no time in presenting his case and the new arrangement with the Australians to the Canadian government. Fleming suggested that a Canadian government subsidy might be in order although he admitted that a fleet of Pacific steamers to improve mail service should have first priority.

In connection with the development of such a trade the cable is only second in importance to a fleet of steamers. Experience has demonstrated that where there is trade there is a demand for telegraphic services, and in cases where trade has to be developed it is an indispensable auxiliary.<sup>2</sup>

Again the Canadian government exhibited great interest in development in the Pacific and in Fleming's proposal.

Hector Langevin said the proposals had been laid before the Council, which now desired to know specifically the cost of the project and amount of subsidy sought.<sup>3</sup> Fleming promptly replied that Sir Alexander Stuart had supplied a cost estimate of £2,100,000, with a subsidy of £70,000 a year to be

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 359, Fleming to Want, 6 April 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, (printed letter) Fleming to Langevin, 8 April 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Langevin to Fleming, 12 April 1886.





divided among the countries concerned.<sup>1</sup> Of this sum the Hawaiian Government had already in 1884 passed *An Act to Encourage Ocean Telegraph Cables*, which promised \$20,000 a year for 15 years for cable connection with North America.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian response to Fleming's request was an Order-in-Council of 8 June 1886 authorizing Tupper to meet with the Australasian, Agents-General and the Colonial Office to discuss a Pacific cable. However, he was instructed not to commit the Canadian government to any specific financial arrangements without authorization.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Macdonald inquired about negotiations with Hawaii, as Canada had no representative there.<sup>4</sup> Fleming replied that he had personally written the Hawaiian King.<sup>5</sup> The Canadian authorization to Tupper to negotiate was timed to take advantage of the current Colonial and Indian Exhibition being held in London.<sup>6</sup> (A Congress of the Chambers of Commerce was also held in July.) Want did not hold much hope of anything

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Langevin, 13 April 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 19, no. 135, T. W. Rae to Fleming, 2 May 1886; (enclosure) Hawaii, *An Act to Encourage Ocean Telegraph Cables*, 21 August 1884.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Langevin to Tupper, 7 June, 8 June, 10 June, & 22 June 1886.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 4 June 1886.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 7 June 1886.

<sup>6</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Canada, Dept. of Public Works to Canada, High Commissioner, 22 June 1886.



developing from talks among the colonial representatives due to the strong financial influence of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company in the Australasian colonies. "I fear you will find some of your colleagues [the Agents-General] weak kneed on the subject."<sup>1</sup>

Fleming spent the entire summer of 1886 (a time of growing imperial interest in Britain) in England working toward the Pacific cable project and attending to private business. He was present at the discussions that took place with the colonial agents, spoke publicly, and wrote extensively in favour of the plan.<sup>2</sup> He also was very active with the Imperial Federation League which on 17 July passed a resolution calling for improved communication.<sup>3</sup> He received a reply from the Hawaiian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Crawford, saying that the Hawaiian subsidy was available to the first company to complete a cable, but that the government would not grant exclusive landing rights to any one company.<sup>4</sup> This was later confirmed to the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Want to Tupper, 25 June 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 18 June to 31 August 1886; Fleming Papers, vol. 118, no. 33 Sandford Fleming (ed.), *DOCUMENTS In Reference To The Establishment of DIRECT TELEGRAPHIC CONNECTION Between AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, CANADA, AND GREAT BRITAIN* (London: 1886).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 112, Imperial Federation League Resolution, 17 July 1886.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 12, no. 78 Crawford to Fleming, 13 July 1886.



British Consul General at Honolulu.<sup>1</sup>

It appeared as if Fleming were closer to success in the Pacific cable than he had ever been before. His associates in the projected Pacific Cable Company were Donald A. Smith, Randolph Want, Andrew Robertson and Matthew Gray, the latter a partner in Silvertowns--one of the larger cable manufacturing firms in England.<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship was not as smooth as it appeared on the surface. Smith was merely allowing his name to be used by Fleming and seldom took any active part in the series of meetings held by the proposed company, leaving Want and Fleming as the two dominant personalities. By mid-July Fleming's tendency to speak and write as if he were the moving force behind the project led to a strain in the relationship between two men. Want considered that he, not Fleming, was providing the motive force for the project. Want privately warned Fleming about making it appear ". . . as purely a Canadian movement . . . I think you will admit that until my scheme for connecting Australia with America was started the project had not in any way been valued. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Stanhope to Canada, Sec. of State, 19 October 1886; *Ibid.*, C.O. to Canada High Commissioner, 19 October 1886; Fleming was finally informed on 25 November 1886, but he had already known the information for four months.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, (joint letter) Smith, Want, Robertson, M. Gray, and Fleming to Tupper, 19 July 1886.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 14 July 1886.



Want requested Fleming to give him some of the credit for the scheme "without laying any particular stress upon it, . . ."<sup>1</sup> From this small beginning a disagreement was to grow, similar to that which had developed between Fleming and Gisborne, until relations between the men would reach the breaking point and the association would be dissolved. Seemingly Fleming could not associate with men on a project of this type unless he could be given the entire public credit and acknowledgement.

Publicly the movement appeared to be moving smoothly. At a meeting of all interested colonial agents and private parties, it was agreed to contact all interested governments and the Colonial Office. All of the colonial representatives favoured the idea except South Australia, which had a heavy capital investment in land telegraph lines and stood to lose financially if a Pacific cable were completed.<sup>2</sup> Fleming timed this to coincide with an interview, "Telegraphic Communication Between Australasia, Canada, and Great Britain" which appeared in the *Canadian Gazette*.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming left London in early August, confiding to Tupper that the matter was now entirely in his hands. He hoped the colonial governments would take up the cable scheme

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Tupper to Canada, Sec. of State, 29 July 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Canadian Gazette*, 29 July 1886.







"along with the steamboat scheme to which it is scarcely if at all second in importance."<sup>1</sup> Fleming said Pender had attempted to see him to discourage him about the scheme. "He is clearly not aware of the arrangement with the Canadian P. Railway under which we can transmit 'through' messages so cheaply, and this is really the key to the whole Canadian & Australian scheme."<sup>2</sup> To Pender on the same date Fleming expressed regret that they could not meet. He said he understood why Pender opposed the scheme--interference with the profits of his companies. However, Fleming felt the cable would come sooner or later and its value made it worthwhile.<sup>3</sup>

During August Want informed Fleming that Heaton was no longer interested in cooperation and was working toward his own company to build a cable. Want still intended to formally register a company in London, but his relationship with Fleming was so unsure that he warned:

Of course you will not propose to do anything in the same direction in Canada or here without fully concerting the matter with me as it would be very prejudicial to have two companies in the field.<sup>4</sup>

Want desired Fleming to recommend Canadian names to include on the tentative Board. He assumed that Fleming and Smith

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Fleming to Tupper, 5 August 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 12 August 1886.



would be at least two of those included. By the next mail Fleming warned Want not to use any names or register a company until Fleming could speak with Smith.<sup>1</sup> Fleming's admonition to Want was enough to keep him from any action while Tupper brought the matter to the attention of Lord Stanhope, the new Colonial Secretary, who promised to bring the matter before the Ministers.<sup>2</sup> There was little chance, however, that the new Conservative government of Salisbury would immediately act on the idea.

With the written assurance of the Colonial Office that the importance of the project was appreciated and that the project would be given careful attention, it became important to learn what the colonial opinion of the project would be.<sup>3</sup> Fleming already had had assurances of Canadian government opinion in favour of the project. On his return to Canada Fleming first saw George Stephen of the C.P.R. to explain how the matter of the Pacific cable stood.<sup>4</sup> Then he saw Sir John A. Macdonald in Ottawa. Macdonald, just back from a two month tour of western Canada, appeared favourably impressed with the results of Fleming's visit to

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Want, 26 August 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 14, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 14 August 1886.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, C.O. to Canada High Commissioner, 18 August 1886.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 3 September 1886.



England. Fleming left copies of all of the documents collected in England regarding the Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup> Fleming spent the remainder of the fall and winter intensively involved with Queen's University business, the C.P.R., and his Lachine Bridge Project.<sup>2</sup>

During this time his involvement with the cable was restricted to his usually voluminous correspondence with all parts of Canada and Great Britain. One of the most useful correspondents was F. A. Hamilton, a cable electrician who had been employed on the *Great Eastern's* cable laying voyages and more recently on other ships laying cables. Hamilton expressed great interest in Fleming's ideas and supplied a great deal of technical information in regard to the problems posed by laying a cable in Pacific waters.<sup>3</sup> This type of information was frequently included by Fleming in his numerous memoranda and speeches on the subject of cable communication.

Randolph Want continued to write frequent and often temperamental letters to Fleming. Fleming's trusting Tupper to approach the British government annoyed Want. He asked if it were a Canadian assumption that no one else had the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 September 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, October through December 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 21, no. 147, Hamilton to Fleming, 15 September 1886.



ear of the government. He added,

I feel a little grieved at being balked in the progress of the matter as I maintain that the whole proposal is purely of my own origination . . . it is my own conception in fact there has been no scheme except mine that has not proposed to join in at some place or other with the existing Eastern Extension lines even your own. . . .<sup>1</sup>

It seems certain at this time, although Fleming continued to urge Want to delay taking action to incorporate a company, by choice Fleming did not plan to associate in the enterprise with Want.

Correspondence with other members of the original interested group of men was more businesslike. Robert Kaye Gray, the brother of Matthew Gray, informed Fleming that, "There is no doubt the Eastern Company and its allies will use every effort to break your scheme."<sup>2</sup> Gray felt the opportune time had come to request a survey from the British government. Andrew Robertson of Montreal and J. G. Colmer of the High Commissioner's Office (Tupper was out of London) agreed with him. The reason was that Lord Lansdowne, presently in England, was the brother-in-law of Lord George Hamilton, the present First Lord of the Admiralty and might aid us materially by speaking to Lord George Hamilton on the subject with a view to the latter ordering a surveying vessel.<sup>3</sup> Gray said many are unhappy with the fact

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 17 September 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 19, no. 136, R. K. Gray to Fleming, 20 September 1886.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, R. K. Gray to J. G. Colmer, 22 September 1886.





that Britain lagged behind the United States, France and Italy in the matter of ocean surveys, nothing having been organized since the Challenger Expedition returned in 1876.<sup>1</sup> (This is, in fact, borne out by the number of occasions on which Fleming was instructed to get American charts for information on the Pacific.)

Tupper informed Fleming in early October that Lord Stanhope of the Colonial Office had sent copies of all information provided by Tupper, to the colonial governments concerned, including India.<sup>2</sup> Fleming replied that he realized governments were considering the matter,

but I feel that in affairs of this kind progress is only made by continual pressure, often by an individual. In this case it must be by an individual until a Company is organized and a company cannot easily be organized until there be some indication of what the Government will do.<sup>3</sup>

To this end Fleming said he planned to address a personal letter to the Australasian governments. In regard to developments within Canada, "I thought possibly I might be able to get the Pacific Railway to move but there are objections and I have not been successful in warming Sir G. Stephen up to it."<sup>4</sup> Fleming added that Stephen "will help when the proper time comes." Fleming stressed

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, C.O. to Canada High Commissioner, 4 October and 8 October 1886.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 12 October 1886.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



twice that "the C.P.R. is the key to the whole situation" and recounted the promise of low rates for messages across Canada. "In the meantime I feel that it devolves upon me to endeavor to advance it step by step."<sup>1</sup> Fleming closed by giving some indication of the problem with Want: Want wished to register a Company using names he would not reveal to Fleming.

On 27 October 1886 the Eastern Extension, Australasia and China Telegraph Company held its annual meeting in London with John Pender, Chairman, presiding. At this meeting it was reported that the subsidies voted to the company by New Zealand and New South Wales had ended. New Zealand had refused to renew the subsidy for ten years and, after discussing the matter in Parliament, had offered a five year subsidy. The Company countered by claiming it had lost money lately on the New Zealand route and only had a ten year average return on its investment of 2 percent. The Company accepted the five year subsidy although it objected to it, but the Julius Vogel Government withdrew its offer because they thought the subsidy would interfere with the laying of an opposition cable, (a reference to Fleming's scheme). In reaction the Company had decided as announced by Pender that,

On Monday next they would put up their rates between Sydney and New Zealand from 6s to 10s., and show that

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*



after having by their private enterprise done so much for the colony, they were not going to be trodden upon in the way attempted.<sup>1</sup>

Actions of this type by the monopolistic Eastern Telegraph Company had a great effect in popularizing Fleming's idea and increased demands for united Colonial action to deal with the problem of communication.

Fleming in early November 1886 sent a letter and printed documents, including Canadian Sessional Papers, to Queensland, West Australia, New Zealand, Victoria and Tasmania outlining his intention to form a company to connect Australasia and Britain via Canada and the C.P.R. telegraph line. Fleming requested a subsidy in return for rates of 4s a word.<sup>2</sup>

While Fleming worked to gain contacts with the colonial governments concerned, Randolph Want in London grew progressively more annoyed with Canadians generally and Fleming in particular. In a series of letters in November, seemingly none of which Fleming answered, Want reported George Stephen's refusal to sign the prospective cable charter (something Fleming already knew) and the fact that Tupper was treating Want and his associates as if they were

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 25, no. 92, (clippings) *Standard*, 28 October 1886; *Electrician*, 29 October 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 20, no. 67, Fleming to each Australasian Colony except South Australia, 4 November and 8 November 1886; (copy) in Fleming Papers, vol. 15, no. 108, *Ibid.*



working independently.<sup>1</sup> Want said he regretted that the Canadians refused to cooperate: "I regret much to fear that there is some strain or suspicion on the part of yourself and friends. . . ."<sup>2</sup> To delay Want and still keep informed, Fleming used Jones to keep reassuring Want that the Canadians were still involved. In November Jones signed a provisional charter for Fleming and Smith on the word of Tupper.<sup>3</sup>

The prospectus of the Pacific Telegraph Company (Limited) finally appeared on 8 December 1886.<sup>4</sup> This was the first registered company with Canadian involvement to propose laying a Pacific cable. Owen Jones appeared as the Secretary of the new company. Robert Kaye Gray continued to keep Fleming informed of the inner movements of the company, as did Jones, while Tupper continued to send Fleming reports of developments in the press and with the British government regarding the survey which had again been requested from the Admiralty and which had again been refused without

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 13 November 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 November 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 27 November 1886.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Post* (London), 13 December 1886; *Electrical Review*, 26 November 1886; Fleming Papers, vol. 24, no. 177, Pacific Telegraph Company Ltd., 8 December 1886.





discussion.<sup>1</sup> Edward Palliser, an English member of the newly chartered company, informed Fleming that nothing would be accomplished as long as Lord Randolph Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out Churchill would resign in December, but Fleming's connection with the Pacific Telegraph Company would not be as favourably resolved.

Owen Jones, still closely connected with but not employed by Fleming, sent him a report on the first general meeting of the Pacific Telegraph Company "(or rather Want's Cable)" as Jones called it. The meeting was not favourable to the Canadian interests involved. Jones was eased out as Secretary by Harold Finch-Hatton who publicly criticized Fleming's action in writing to the Australasian Colonies.<sup>3</sup> Want emphasized that Fleming's actions have had a "baneful influence" on the scheme. Want said he had written to the same people to correct the impression that Fleming is in opposition to the Pacific Telegraph Company. Want said there were too many names representing Canada in the company, and they must be reduced to one.<sup>4</sup> Jones two days later

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 67, Admiralty to Tupper, 16 November 1886; *Ibid.*, Tupper to Admiralty, 25 November 1886; *Ibid.*, Admiralty to Tupper 10 December 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 37, no. 269, Palliser to Fleming, 14 December 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 22 December 1886.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 28 December 1886.



reported that he had been named as a Director to represent Canadian interests, while Fleming's and Smith's names had been removed. Robertson had earlier been dropped from the list on the charter.<sup>1</sup> The confused position of the Canadians, Fleming and Smith, both of whom had paid the initial £10 fee for one share in the Pacific Telegraph Company was clarified by 1 January by H. F. Finch-Hatton, the new Secretary, who said a company had been formed and that Fleming, Smith, and Robertson would be offered positions of Representative Agents in Canada with the duty to get landing rights, and a subsidy from the Canadian government.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming summarized his own connection with the scheme in a letter to Tupper on 3 January. He felt registration of a company was "hasty action" but hoped it would advance the scheme. "I shall be grateful to see the work accomplished as speedily as possible the manner in which it may be done is secondary provided it be done & done well."<sup>3</sup> Fleming stressed the importance of the cable to improving Australian-Canadian relations and strengthening the Empire. "In that sense the Pacific Cable is second to no undertaking projected at the present time."<sup>4</sup> Fleming felt so strongly about

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 30 December 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 21, no. 151, Finch-Hatton to Fleming, 1 January, 1887.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Fleming to Tupper, 3 January 1887.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



the need for the cable and the prerequisite Pacific survey that he informed Tupper in view of the Admiralty's repeated refusal to do the task, he had used his influence to have the Canadian ship *Alert* moved to Halifax from Pictou Harbour to avoid having it frozen in for the winter. At the same time Fleming made application to the Canadian government to allow the *Alert* to be used for the Pacific survey. He hoped the company would provide the necessary \$33,000 for an eight month voyage but if they failed, "I see nothing left but to assume the responsibility myself . . . [it] must be done come what may."<sup>1</sup>

The Pacific Telegraph Company refused to provide any capital for a survey until promised a subsidy.<sup>2</sup> There could be no subsidy from the governments concerned until the question of the feasibility of the cable was settled by a survey. The Directors of the company were willing to have Fleming's aid in the project and in theory he and Smith were still represented on the Board of Directors by Owen Jones.<sup>3</sup> Randolph Want continued to be more critical of the steps taken by Fleming to directly contact the Australasian colonies, "I cannot tell you how much I deplore this. . . ."

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, Fleming to Jones 3 January 1887.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 21, no. 151, Finch-Hatton to Fleming, 18 January 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 19 January 1887.



because he claimed Fleming's proposals were quite different from those of the company.<sup>1</sup> At a meeting of the Company Directors on 3 February 1887 an attempt was made to restructure the company leaving out Jones and thus all Canadian interests. The attempt failed. Jones warned Fleming that Want desired only,

the support you can get *him*, from the Dominion Govt- and C.P.R. and then he would drop you like a hot potato, it is patent to all of us, that he is jealous of you, and hence his wish to get rid of me . . . .<sup>2</sup>

Again the Admiralty refused to complete a survey even if the Canadian government provided a ship (the *Alert*) and Fleming agreed to personally pay half the cost.<sup>3</sup>

In March 1887 Fleming shifted his attention from all other questions, including the Pacific Telegraph Company, to total involvement in the larger problem of imperial communication. He was appointed as one of two Canadian delegates to attend the Colonial Conference to be held in London in April to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. Fleming was informed of the appointment at a dinner party at Macdonald's home. Within a few days he left for England to join the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 259, Want to Fleming, 20 January 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming 3 February 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 37, no. 269, Palliser to Fleming, 15 February 1887 and 22 February 1887; (includes copy of) Admiralty to Pacific Telegraph Company Limited, 18 February 1887.





other Canadian delegate, Sir Alexander Campbell, who until January had been a Minister in the Macdonald government.<sup>1</sup>

It has been claimed that Macdonald selected these two men because,

He knew that they were very unlikely to act with any great initiative or energy at the Colonial Conference. He was not dissatisfied. He did not particularly want them to play a constructive part.<sup>2</sup>

However, it would seem from the continuous support that Macdonald had given to the project, that he selected Fleming as the Canadian best suited to discuss the question of imperial communication. At the same time Fleming was not in a position to commit the Canadian government to any obligation in the matter. Fleming certainly was not a man who could be expected to lack initiative and energy on a question to which he had devoted so much time and effort over the preceding eight years. Fleming's appointment was also popular in Canada with those favouring a closer imperial connection. George Parkin wrote that he favoured Fleming's appointment as a delegate but feared some objections due to Fleming's involvement with the Telegraph scheme.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 16 March 1887; (copy) *Ibid.*, vol. 39, no. 280, Canada, Governor General to Canada, Minister of Finance, 19 March 1887; *Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Canada, Privy Council to Fleming, 21 March 1887.

<sup>2</sup>Creighton, *The Old Chieftain*, pp. 475-76.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 270, Parkin to Fleming, 27 January 1887.



The discussion of the question at the 1887 Colonial Conference brought a new dimension to the quest for a telegraph cable across the Pacific Ocean. In the eight years prior to the Conference the Pacific cable scheme had evolved, largely through Sandford Fleming's work, from a project oriented toward personal profit to one based upon extensive government involvement. Recognition of the importance of the scheme to the British Empire grew during this same period and with it Fleming's ideas of the importance of communication facilities linking remote sections of the Empire. While he had tentatively brought forth some of these ideas, the experience of the Colonial Conference brought them into full flower. Fleming alone in Canada was responsible for stressing the need for a Pacific cable which resulted in encouraging the Australasian colonies to rebel against monopolistic cable control and take up the cause of an alternative with extensive government involvement.

Fleming gave token support to men such as George Parkin and George Denison who sought a type of Imperial Federation. In the same fashion he gave token support to any group or company seeking to construct a British Pacific cable in 1887. Fleming's ultimate aim was based upon his own ideas regarding the importance of communication as the first step to closer imperial relations. As an engineer Fleming had devoted his life to vast projects of very basic and visible value to Canada and to the Empire. In the question of the



Pacific cable and communication he merely applied his theories of western Canadian development to a wider imperial field. The objective of a British Pacific cable to ensure improved, less expensive communication could be justified by Fleming no matter how it came into being. This objective was primary to him at the 1887 Conference in London.



## CHAPTER V

### 1887 COLONIAL CONFERENCE

Sandford Fleming traveled to London with his daughter in early April, 1887, filled with expectations of progress on a Pacific cable. He was a delegate to a Conference commemorating Queen Victoria's fiftieth year of rule; a Conference prompted by "the interest which, in an increasing degree, is evinced by the people of this country in the welfare of their Colonial and Indian fellow subjects."<sup>1</sup> This interest was in large part due to work by the Imperial Federation League in propagating the idea of imperial unity since 1884 and especially during the summer of 1886. Fleming had taken an active part in this movement in London as well as in Canada in 1886. His selection as a Canadian delegate by Macdonald was influenced by the wide acquaintance and respect enjoyed by Fleming among British business and colonial officials in London.

Of specific interest to the Pacific cable scheme was the reference in Queen Victoria's statement of 1886 that:

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<sup>1</sup>The Queen's speech proroguing Parliament in 1886, cited in: C.O. 885/5, No. 64, Stanhope to the Governors of the Colonies under Responsible Government, 25 November 1886, p. 1.





"there is on all sides a growing desire to draw closer in every practical way the bonds which unite the various portions of the Empire."<sup>1</sup> Fleming had spent a lifetime working in numerous "practical ways," the Pacific cable currently viewed by him as the most important and necessary "way". Fleming's associate, Sir Alexander Campbell, shared his enthusiasm for the cable project with the reservation that responsibilities and cost be shared by Britain and other interested colonies.

The two leading subjects which the Colonial Secretaries Stanhope and (after 25 November 1886) Henry Holland wished to be discussed at the Conference were, in order of importance: defence and postal and telegraphic communication.<sup>2</sup> The subject of a Pacific cable could reasonably be introduced as a subject for discussion. Defence was by far the major subject discussed at the conference, occupying ten of the twenty days of the conference; whereas, Pacific cable scheme discussion occupied less than four days at the conference.

The opening meeting of the conference was attended by a full complement of delegates and was held in the spacious quarters of the Foreign Office. Though not officially taking part, Lord Salisbury attended and presented an

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.



address to the assembled delegates. It remained for Colonial Secretary Henry Holland to define the limits of the conference in his address following Salisbury's. He stressed that Her Majesty's Government was interested in more efficient use of current expenditures rather than incurring new obligations. In regard to communication he stressed that ". . . the question of Imperial intercommunication should be considered as a whole" to meet the needs of all areas of the Empire.<sup>1</sup>

Holland stated that he had been made aware by Sir John Pender of the rapid growth of submarine telegraphy, of the need for British control in the field, and of the need for tariffs to be set as low as possible.<sup>2</sup> In regard to the question of a Pacific cable, Sir Charles Tupper's letter of 29 July 1886, was printed with Fleming's memorandum for the information of the delegates.<sup>3</sup> Holland's position was:

I fear that at the present stage I can only invite the Australasian and Canadian members of the Conference to favour Her Majesty's Government with their views generally upon the scheme for laying a cable across the Pacific from Vancouver to some point in one of the Australasian Colonies.<sup>4</sup>

Sandford Fleming took little active part during the

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<sup>1</sup>Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, vol. LVI, C.5091, "*Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1887*," p. 13 (hereinafter cited as Parl. Pap.).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>3</sup>C.O. 885/5, No. 68, pp. 94, 104.

<sup>4</sup>Parl. Pap., 1887, vol. LVI, C. 5091, p. 14.



first nine meetings of the conference, other than offering some favourable comments regarding the C.P.R. during the postal discussion. The questions being considered dealt generally with defence in various sections of the Empire or legal points. Campbell merely observed the defence discussions, but with his legal background, actively participated in discussions on such questions as judgements of colonial courts, bankruptcy, and regulation of investment of trust funds and colonial stock.

Sandford Fleming used these first two weeks to prepare a paper on the Pacific cable to be presented to the conference on Wednesday, April 20th. During this period he also exchanged letters with Randolph Want who now desperately wanted Fleming's cooperation. Want warned Fleming that Sir John Pender had a tight grip on some unnamed "high Imperial Officials," making it very difficult to dispose of him.<sup>1</sup> Fleming replied that "nothing has arisen which you are not perfectly familiar with . . . ." <sup>2</sup> He emphasized, however, that he would cooperate with anyone "seriously interested" in Canadian-Australasian communication. Randolph Want never again attempted to induce Fleming to cooperate with the Pacific Cable Company, although it continued to exist for several years.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 51, no. 359, Want to Fleming, 13 April 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Want, 18 April 1887.



Fleming had every advantage in presenting his scheme to the conference delegates on 20 April. The Pacific cable was the first question considered on that day, and Fleming was the first speaker on that question. Fleming's remarks submitted to the conference in written form as a memorandum stressed several major points in connection with the Pacific cable. He stressed that, "There can be no efficient intercourse nowadays without the telegraph."<sup>1</sup> He used Pender's own statements to show "that general mercantile business cannot be economically conducted without the telegraph; that in fact the telegraph is an indispensable auxiliary to all commercial transactions between persons separated by distance."<sup>2</sup> In order for the Empire to take full commercial advantage of the facilities provided by Canada in the C.P.R., it was essential, argued Fleming, that the final communication link with Australasia be established.

Another major point stressed by Fleming in his remarks was the relative insecurity of the existing telegraph cables. He emphatically stated that Britain should not have to depend upon the stability of the Ottoman government for the safety of communication with India, the Cape, and

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<sup>1</sup>Parl. Pap., 1887, vol. LVI, C.5091, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*





Australasia.<sup>1</sup> In this connection Fleming addressed himself to some of Pender's letters to the conference objecting to a Pacific cable. Fleming charged that Pender and his associates were motivated entirely by self-interest, for any new cable "would undoubtedly destroy their monopoly and reduce the exceedingly high charges which they have so long enjoyed."<sup>2</sup> Fleming lightly dismissed Pender's objection to the scheme because it was an impossible engineering feat. He stated that Canada had "learned to disregard objections of this kind."<sup>3</sup> If such forewarnings had been heeded, the C.P.R. would never have been attempted. The public welfare of the Empire demanded that the monopoly possessed by the Pender interests be removed and the way opened for closer, less expensive ties of communication between two of the most important divisions of the British Empire. In regard to Canada and Australasia, Fleming asked: "Are commercial relations between two of the most important divisions of the British family for ever to remain dormant in order that the profits of a company may be maintained?"<sup>4</sup> Fleming

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.



concluded with a plea that communication was the key "for securing to the Empire in perpetuity a masterful hold on the Pacific."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that in the ensuing discussion Fleming had a difficult time asserting that he had no private business interest in the scheme, initial reaction to Fleming's remarks was quite favourable. Sir John Rose wrote that they were admirable. Rose took the liberty of sending copies to Lord Carnarvon for use in the House of Lords and to the editor of the *Times*. Fleming's remarks of 20 April and his remarks of 27 April on the same subject were widely distributed at the time in printed form.<sup>2</sup>

John Pender was not among those who admired Fleming's remarks to the conference. Privately he wrote that Fleming had been unfair in his remarks about the Eastern Telegraph Company and its associated companies. Fleming replied that he only wished to present the situation as he saw it. "I have therefore submitted that the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company should be bought out on fair terms by the Govt. and worked by a Department of the Govts."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 104, *Confidential: Postal and Telegraphic Communication By The Canadian Route*, 19 & 20 April 1887; *Telegraphic Communication to India & Australia By The Candian Route*, 27 April 1887.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 273, Fleming to Pender, 27 April 1887; and Parl. Pap., 1887, vol. LVI, C.5091, pp. 340-41.



As the conference neared its end, Sir Alexander Campbell and Sandford Fleming could not agree on the wisest course of action to follow in the Pacific cable question. Fleming favoured concrete proposals, which he hoped the conference might consider. Campbell was not sure if it was wise to pressure the conference for an opinion, since his private conversations with Holland and Salisbury appeared to be making some headway.<sup>1</sup> By the morning of 6 May when the day's meeting was to consider telegraphic communication along with twelve other topics, the two men reached a compromise plan of action. Fleming agreed to Campbell's presentation of two proposals from a suggested list of six to be framed as resolutions.<sup>2</sup>

Campbell addressed the delegates with a plea that some statement of the views of the conference in regard to imperial communication be put into the record. Campbell reminded the conference that Her Majesty's Government as well as Her subjects desired closer communication ties. Speaking for Canada he firmly stated that

. . . we think we have afforded the best means of doing by opening the line of railway telegraph across the Continent of America. We have placed it in the power of Her Majesty's Government in Great Britain to draw closer those bonds by the most important of all ties, the ties of speedy communication, the ties of interest, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 8, no. 50, Campbell to Fleming, 5 May 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



ties which spring from opportunities of making communications from one end of Her Majesty's dominions to the other by telegraph lines almost entirely within the control of Her Majesty's subjects. These we think are the most important means which could be resorted to for drawing closer those bonds between the different parts of the Empire which we all value so much.<sup>1</sup>

Campbell used the enthusiasm for the subject which had been aroused by his remarks to gain general approval for two resolutions on the Pacific cable. The first Resolution was:

That the connection recently formed through Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific by railway telegraph opens a new and alternative line of Imperial communication over the high seas and through British possessions which promises to be of great value alike in naval, military, commercial, and political aspects.<sup>2</sup>

The second was:

That the connection of Canada with Australasia by direct submarine telegraph across the Pacific is a project of high importance to the Empire, and every doubt as to its practicability should without delay be set at rest by a thorough and exhaustive survey.<sup>3</sup>

Each resolution was met with an enthusiastic "Hear, hear," from the assembled delegates. Fleming quickly rose to add a few comments supporting the resolutions. The subject was then closed by the President, Henry Holland repeating the resolutions on the understanding that "the general assent" of the delegates had been given. Again all present responded with "hear, hear."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Parl. Pap., 1887, vol. LVI, C.5091, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 514.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 517.





Sandford Fleming had good reason to be extremely pleased with the progress made at the conference in regard to the Pacific cable. The adoption of the two resolutions went far beyond the expression of general views sought by the Colonial Office when they included the subject on the agenda of the conference. Alexander Campbell felt that the subject had been pushed far enough for the present, but Fleming was not satisfied. He sought to introduce a letter calling for a survey to Henry Holland at the conference. Campbell cautioned Fleming that everyone had agreed that only Holland would select the subjects for discussion at the conference and he might view this as encroachment on his right.<sup>1</sup> Fleming finally deferred to Campbell's opinion not to submit his views to the conference. In turn, Campbell agreed to accompany Fleming to present the comments on a Pacific survey to Holland and Lord Salisbury in person on the last day of the conference, 9 May.<sup>2</sup>

The end of the Colonial Conference saw few results of a concrete nature. The imperial officials had successfully avoided the potentially disruptive issue of closer political ties for the Empire. Only in the question of defence was anything practical achieved with the Australasian colonies agreeing to provide a subsidy towards the

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 8, no. 50, Campbell to Fleming, 9 May 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 9 May 1887.



cost of a naval squadron in Pacific waters. In the other questions discussed including communication little of specific importance had resulted.<sup>1</sup> The conference had at least given the colonial representatives an opportunity to express the opinions of their respective governments. This fact alone was an indication of an increased appreciation of the value of the Empire on the part of Her Majesty's Government.

Fleming was convinced that the imperial government would now respond with definite action in regard to the Pacific survey because of the resolutions passed at the conference. For this reason he decided to remain in London to work toward this end while Alexander Campbell returned to Canada. So it was Campbell who drafted the report of the conference for the benefit of the Canadian government. The report summarized in great detail much of the discussion which took place at the conference. In regard to the Pacific cable, Campbell concluded that:

I was so much struck by the importance of Mr. Fleming's statements that I strongly urged upon him the advisability of preserving them in order that they might be laid before Your Excellency's Government.<sup>2</sup>

Campbell described Fleming as an "able and zealous man" and explained that Fleming had remained in London in connection with the cable.

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<sup>1</sup>J. E. Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conference, 1887-1911 A Study in Imperial Organization*, The Royal Commonwealth Society, Imperial Studies No. XXVIII (London: 1967), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 194, Campbell to Lansdowne, June 1887, p. 20 (copy).



Fleming remained in London throughout the months of May and June, 1887. He was convinced that the Admiralty would eventually undertake a survey of the Pacific cable route, but as he wrote to Sir Julius Vogel, "it will require pressure . . ." from the colonial governments.<sup>1</sup> Fleming's course of action was to obtain a petition signed by twenty of the delegates to the recent conference requesting that a Pacific survey be made at once.<sup>2</sup> The Colonial Office answer was an Admiralty statement that the requested survey would be made along with other Pacific survey work during the course of the next few years. A special survey would not be made.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming refused to accept the negative answer from the Colonial Office. He wrote again this time requesting an interview at which the remaining Colonial delegates who had signed the petition could press their views regarding a Pacific survey. Fleming emphasized that:

. . . the course proposed to be followed will not accomplish the desired end . . . [because] In an Imperial point of view its importance was held at the Conference to be second to no other question brought forward for discussion . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 356, Fleming to Vogel, 27 May 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 23, no. 161, Fleming to Holland, 16 May 1887 (copy).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Meade to Fleming, 3 June 1887; (enclosures) C.O., to Admiralty, 23 May 1887 (copy); and Admiralty to C.O., 25 May 1887, (copy).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Baillie-Hamilton, and Fleming to C.O., 8 June 1887.





Fleming overstated his position when he added that unless this request were granted it would greatly disappoint the twenty delegates who had signed the petition and their governments. Fleming and the delegates had not been expressly instructed to press the cable issue by petition. Henry Holland obviously was annoyed at the persistence of the Canadian on the subject of the survey. His reply to Fleming was firm to the point of being blunt and left no room for Fleming to reopen the subject.

You are asking me in truth to have another meeting of the Conference & I think this inconvenient. I am not disposed to open up a discussion upon resolutions which were passed at the Conference.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming was not impelled to attempt direct pressure upon the Colonial Office for some time after receiving Henry Holland's firm refusal. Writing to Sir Charles Tupper prior to departing from England, Fleming complained:

In the matter of the Pacific cable, I have found the influence of the Eastern Telegraph Company all powerful, it permeates everywhere, high & low, where and when least expected difficulties are presented, . . . It appeared to be the object of Mr. Pender and other witnesses, officers of the Government who were called, to prove that the scheme was impracticable.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming felt that the proper responsibility for the Pacific survey rested with the imperial government because largely they had raised the question of the practicality of the entire scheme. Surely, he explained to Tupper, "a

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Holland to Fleming, 9 June 1887.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Fleming to Tupper, 7 July 1887.





special appeal from the Australian Colonies and from Canada on that ground would be listened to."<sup>1</sup> Fleming believed that temporarily he had accomplished all that was possible in London: "I now propose to go at once to Canada to submit the whole matter to the Government."<sup>2</sup> But he encouraged Tupper to continue to London to press the need for the survey "in the proper quarter."<sup>3</sup>

Her Majesty's Government was not inclined to take any initiative in a Pacific cable. The influence of the Eastern Telegraph Directors, as well as the value of its existing cables and the desire of the government not to embark on new expenditures, meant that there was no enthusiasm from this quarter. Colonial Secretary Henry Holland in his summary of the results of the recent conference for the benefit of the colonial Governors, reported "The most valuable decision arrived at by means of the conference was that relating to the increase of the Australasian squadron. . . ."<sup>4</sup> In connection with the subject of telegraphic communication Holland emphasized that the project of an alternative line to Australia was prominently discussed and especially "warmly advocated by the representatives of the Dominion of Canada, as being a route deserving to be placed in

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Parl. Pap., 1887, vol. LVI, C.5091, p. 237.



competition with the existing line in point of speed, convenience, and economy. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Holland affirmed that he had promised to bring the matter of a government-controlled line to the attention of Her Majesty's Government but, "I could not hold out any hope that such a scheme would be favorably received."<sup>2</sup> The question of the survey requested by the delegates was not mentioned.

The Government of Canada had taken action in regard to the cable question even before Fleming returned to bring the matter to their attention. In response to a subsidy proposal from Want's Pacific Telegraph Company the Privy Council decided to offer one-tenth of a subsidy requested or £7,500 per year for 25 years on the condition that Great Britain and the other interested colonies also contribute.<sup>3</sup> This offer was met with a response from the Colonial Office in accord with that stated by Holland in the summary of the conference. The Government would consider the offer but held little hope for implementation.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Privy Council Report No. 1543 to Tupper, 19 July 1887; The details of the Pacific Cable Company Proposal were identical to those of an amended proposal submitted to the President of the Colonial Conference on 3 May 1887. It was not discussed at the Conference on the basis that delegates were only to give opinions and could not bind their respective Governments to any decision; see Fleming Papers, vol. 21, no. 151, Finch-Hatton to Holland (copy), 3 May 1887.



Returning to Canada in mid-summer, Sandford Fleming did not immediately bring the cable matter to the attention of the Macdonald Government. The Conservatives were involved in a sharp dispute with the United States over the vexing coastal fisheries. In addition, there was great agitation in Manitoba over the C.P.R.'s monopolistic position in the province. Parliament prorogued in late June, and finally Macdonald was able to take a needed vacation to New Brunswick in August. Fleming too spent the late summer in the Maritimes with his family at "The Dingle," his summer home outside of Halifax. Along with salmon fishing and pleasant trips to Sable Island and Louisbourg, Fleming drafted a report of his activities in London during and after the Colonial Conference.<sup>1</sup>

This report, containing copies of all relevant correspondence, in Fleming's methodical fashion, stressed that Campbell's summary of the conference was acceptable to Fleming. Of concern to Fleming was the refusal of the British Admiralty to actively undertake the Pacific survey requested by the conference delegates. Fleming hoped that Macdonald would bring the matter to the attention of the other colonial governments concerned, for Fleming felt this to be the only way to proceed.<sup>2</sup> Fleming also used the late

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, July & August 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 8 August 1887.



summer to catch up on his normally heavy personal correspondence. From Alfred Deakin of the Colony of Victoria he learned that the scheme received a favourable reception in at least that Australian colony.<sup>1</sup>

By early September Macdonald and Fleming had both returned to Ottawa. A degree of confusion had arisen in connection with the cable question due to a series of requests for information and replies from the Colonial Office, each requiring several weeks to make the round trip via the Atlantic mails. The Colonial Office and the Admiralty continued to maintain their firm stance: There would be no rapid survey of the cable route, and there could be no cable until the doubts raised at the conference about the practicality of the scheme were removed by a survey.<sup>2</sup> The position taken by the Canadian government as recommended by Superintendent of Telegraphs, F. N. Gisborne, was to take no further action pending some alteration on the part of Her Majesty's Government on the question of the Pacific survey.<sup>3</sup> Fleming, Tupper, the Canadian High Commissioner, and the Pacific Cable Company were all informed of this decision.

Sandford Fleming was not prepared to allow the matter to simply stagnate. He again informed Macdonald that if the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 12, no. 83, Deakin to Fleming, 28 July 1887.

<sup>2</sup>See (copies) C.H.C., Holland to Lansdowne, vol. 20, no. 68, 1 September 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Lansdowne to Holland, 8 September 1887 (copy).





colonies took the initiative in the survey, Great Britain would eventually join.<sup>1</sup> Since the Canadian Government was willing to cooperate but not to instigate action in the matter, Fleming acted on his own behalf. He drafted a letter on the subject of the survey and an extensive memorandum on the subject of the Government's "taking over at a valuation" the Eastern Extension Company's cables. Copies were sent to the Secretary of State for The Colonies, to Hon. J. A. Chapleau, Secretary of State for Canada, as well as to each of the Australian colonies and to New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> The essential feature of Fleming's proposal was for Canada to furnish the men and the ship for the survey, while the other interested colonies would provide the necessary £6,000 for the twelve-month voyage.<sup>3</sup> Having taken this action, Fleming was forced to await replies from Australasia--an eight-week delay in 1888.

There was some indication that the Macdonald Government was not entirely enthused with Fleming's persistence and initiative in the cable question, though, in general, the scheme was favoured. At this time a question was raised about repaying the delegates Campbell and Fleming for their

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 22 September 1887.

<sup>2</sup>For a copy of the letter and Memorandum with a list of those to whom it was sent see: Fleming Papers, vol. 9, no. 60, Fleming to Chapleau, 26 September 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



expenses at the London Conference held in April and May. Fleming had remained in London under the impression that he was still representing the Canadian government even though his appointment only covered the period of the Conference. Alexander Campbell, on the other hand, returned immediately to Canada to report to the government. He had been forced by Fleming's absence to draft the Report alone. Fleming's report on the conference drafted in August had emphasized only his activities after the conference and after Campbell's departure. The result was that Macdonald wrote to Campbell in October: "They all say it was that your expenses should be paid and S. Fleming's not. So make out a liberal a/c and send it on."<sup>1</sup> There is no indication that Fleming's post-conference expenses were ever paid by the Canadian government.

While awaiting developments from his correspondence to other colonies, Fleming found himself intensively engaged in a new crusade on a matter closely connected with the Pacific cable--annexation of Pacific islands. The question of British control of islands in the Pacific had been brought up at the 1887 Colonial Conference and was one upon which there was wide disagreement between Britain and the Australasian Colonies. Generally the Australasians sought British annexation of numerous unclaimed islands or contested

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<sup>1</sup>Archives of Ontario, Alexander Campbell Papers, Macdonald to Campbell, 4 October 1887.



islands in the South Pacific. Great Britain appeared desirous of avoiding greater responsibilities in the area and pursued a policy of cooperation when possible with other European nations and with the United States.<sup>1</sup>

At the Colonial Conference neither Fleming nor Campbell had taken an active part in discussion upon the island question. However, Fleming's attention had been drawn to the importance of certain islands as cable stations by Admiralty Hydrographer A. J. Wharton. Three islands--Fanning, Christmas, and Penrhyn--were suggested as being essential to any Pacific cable scheme to Australasia. Wharton advised Fleming to "get Sir H. Holland to move for their formal annexation to prevent mishaps."<sup>2</sup> The survey question occupied Fleming's attention after the conference, and he gave little thought to the island question until the complete rejection of the survey by the Admiralty.

Wharton wrote again to Fleming in late October, this time strongly advising "that you should try to get the Canadian Government to move the Imperial Govt. to take undoubted possession of Christmas Is, Fanning Is & Penrhyn."<sup>3</sup> Wharton stressed that the Great Britain had no possessions at all in

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<sup>1</sup>For details on the larger aspects of the question see: W. P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford: 1960); Angus Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations In The Pacific In The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: 1964); Douglas L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: 1961).

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 53, no. 365, Wharton to Fleming, 14 May 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 October 1887.



the Eastern Pacific although British subjects had occupied several of the islands for some years. Wharton attempted to do all he could in Britain regarding the islands "but no one takes much interest in it."

Fanning or Christmas is wanted for your cable, though you know I do not believe in the financial practicality of it in the present conditions of population & trade in the Colonies, but I should be sorry to say what may be wanted in the future . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Wharton believed that either Lord Lansdowne or the Canadian Government must exert pressure in the matter if anything was to be accomplished.

Fleming now had the time to devote to the island question. He reacted immediately, preparing a memorandum on the problem for submission to the Canadian government. Following conversations with Macdonald, Lansdowne, and George Foster, Fleming was informed that Macdonald did not wish to bring the matter before the Privy Council, but it was suggested that Lansdowne would cable the information to Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> The essence of Fleming's memorandum was that Britain should take possession of certain Pacific islands on the route from British Columbia to Australasia for purposes of communication and trade. Fleming pointed out that although British charts showed a number of islands belonging

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 October 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 12 November 1887.





to Britain, in actual fact, Britain had not claimed a single island in the Eastern Pacific. He concluded:

As far as I can learn there are no diplomatic difficulties in the way, I would strongly advise therefore that the Home Government be moved as speedily as possible to take undoubted possession of these Islands.<sup>1</sup>

Governor General Lansdowne at first replied that MacDonald had mentioned the matter and that the Secretary of State for the Colonies would be notified.<sup>2</sup> Prior to writing, Lansdowne apparently wished to learn the location of the desired islands. He consulted an atlas only to find these islands listed as belonging to the United States. He immediately contacted Fleming suggesting that the actual ownership of the islands should be clarified.<sup>3</sup>

Sandford Fleming was accustomed to dealing with potentially difficult problems by reacting swiftly and directly. If the islands necessary for cable relay stations for a Pacific cable were shown to be American-owned, then Washington was the place to go for information. Fleming was aware, however, of American interest in the Pacific and felt it would be unwise to arouse American interest in specific islands whose sovereignty might be uncertain. What was needed was someone to conduct inquiries in Washington without

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 194, Fleming to Lansdowne (printed memorandum) *Memorandum respecting the possession of certain Islands in the Pacific between Canada and Australia*, 12 November 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Lansdowne to Fleming, 12 November 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 November 1887. The Atlas consulted by Lansdowne was by Rand, McNally & Co. (Chicago: 1883).



arousing suspicion; obviously Fleming could not do so. Fortunately for him, in Ottawa a number of men were preparing to go to Washington to attend meetings of the Joint High Commission which was to deal with the contentious fisheries questions and possibly others of interest to Canada. One of these men was Major-General D. R. Cameron, R.A., an expert on the Alaska boundary question. Cameron was to act as an aid to the delegation headed by Tupper and Joseph Chamberlain, and give advice if, as hoped by the Canadians, the Alaska boundary question were discussed. The Commission had been agreed upon in August and the first meeting was scheduled for 21 November 1887.

As Fleming later explained to Governor General Lansdowne, he had requested Cameron to take the inquiry in hand in his spare hours. Fleming convinced Cameron of the importance of the question and the necessity for using tact and judgement,

so as to obtain all facts and particulars and ascertain the exact nature of the claims, if any, of the United States, without attracting attention--especially avoiding the risk of having the matter noticed in any way in the newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming soon requested Cameron to extend the inquiry to the Hawaiian Islands in an effort to determine the exact nature of U.S.-Hawaiian treaty terms and to determine the steps that would be required to secure cable landing privileges

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 48, no. 332, Fleming to Captain Streatfield, 31 December 1887; Streatfield was at the time Secretary to Governor General Lansdowne.



in these islands.<sup>1</sup> The 1887-1888 Joint High Commission meetings in November and December, which were of great importance to Canada, served as a distraction for both press and officials, allowing Fleming's "discreet inquiry" to be carried forward.<sup>2</sup>

Upon arrival in Washington from Ottawa, Cameron conferred with Tupper regarding Fleming's commission. Tupper agreed to see the British Ambassador, Sir Lionel West, regarding the subject. Cameron stressed that,

I expressed the opinion that Sir Lionel should not refer to the matter in his correspondence with the Imperial Government, at all events, until the Governor General had an opportunity of considering the information that may be obtained.<sup>3</sup>

Cameron also was "confirmed in the impression I formed at first that it would be a mistake to run any risk of directing attention to the subject . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Having informed his

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note that immediately prior to the mission of Cameron, Robert K. Gray had suggested privately to Fleming that the Joint High Commission might be used to further the Pacific cable. Gray believed that "Chamberlain & Sir Charles Tupper may as Imperial Commissioners be obliged to give way, in the Fisheries Question on certain points which may be damaging to Canadian interest." If Tupper conceded for the sake of Imperial interest, in exchange "Sir Charles might be able to make use of the opportunity for furthering the Pacific Cable scheme." *Ibid.*, vol. 19, no. 136, Gray to Fleming, 2 November 1887. There is no indication however that Fleming ever attempted to act on Gray's suggestion.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 48, Cameron to Fleming, 23 November 1887.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



superiors of his mission, Cameron began his inquiries.

Cameron soon found that the subject of American sovereignty over Pacific islands presented a very confusing picture. The island of primary interest--Fanning--discovered by an American whaling captain of the same name, appeared on American charts as America Island. This island had been claimed under the United States' Act of 1856 pertaining to the guano trade. British and American methods of annexation were quite different, for it appeared as if islands could be abandoned to unclaimed status under the American regulations. Fanning Island had been found unprofitable for the guano trade and never was exploited.<sup>1,2</sup>

While Cameron attempted to untangle the complicated legal history of islands claimed under the guano acts, he pressed for details of American involvement in the Hawaiian Islands. He found that in November of 1887 the United States had finally been successful in obtaining a long term lease on Pearl Harbor as a coaling station. Sir Lionel West informed Cameron that the United States had used reciprocity clauses as a threat to force the concession. The United States still

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<sup>1</sup>Cameron referred specifically to the *Revised Statutes of the United States*, Title LXXII, Sections 5570 through 5578.

<sup>2</sup>Cameron also discovered that the U.S. Geodetical and Coast Survey Department felt that the Rand & McNally Atlas consulted by Lansdowne was not particularly accurate. They favoured *Stieler's Hand Atlas* (1879) a German publication used by Fleming, which showed the contested islands to be British owned.





had no territorial rights in the Islands.<sup>1</sup> The Hawaiian Minister in Washington, Henry Carter, took issue with West's interpretation of events. Carter claimed that the British had been offered and rejected the harbor some years before, because they were not prepared to spend the two million dollars needed to improve it. Carter emphasized that Hawaii was vitally interested in cable communication with any other point, and would provide subsidies to any group succeeding in laying a cable.<sup>2</sup>

Carter was also very informative regarding Fanning Island, which he doubted was still claimed by the United States. The Island was currently owned by William Greig who lived on it and worked the "Cocoa-nut trade." Greig was a British subject but conducted his business through Honolulu where he maintained an agency.<sup>3</sup> The question of sovereignty remained unsettled, however, as the clerk in charge of the guano island question in the U.S. State Department informed Cameron that: "The question of how long a discoverers title would remain valid if he did not exercise his rights, had not been determined."<sup>4</sup> Cameron continued his investigations for another week before drawing up his final report and recommendations for Fleming.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 7, no. 48, Cameron to Fleming, 13 December 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 December 1887.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 December 1887.



The conclusions drawn by Cameron from his inquiries at the U.S. Treasury, the U.S. Geodetic & Coast Survey, the U.S. State Department, and the Hawaiian Mission in Washington concerned several points. Cameron felt that the United States was moving toward acquisition of influence and possibly territory in the Pacific. Further U.S. acts such as that regarding Pearl Harbor would make British action in the area difficult, if not impossible. It seemed apparent that the United States would take action

on the least suspicion arising of a movement on the part of the British to consolidate the Empire or its Commercial interests by the acquisition of Pacific Islands . . . .<sup>1</sup>

On this basis Cameron recommended that those interested in the Empire should act immediately.

Her Majesty's Government should take immediate action to secure stepping stones on a line of communication between British Columbia and Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically in regard to Christmas, Penrhyn, and especially Fanning Island "some act of sovereignty should be exercised by Her Majesty's Government in order to confirm the territorial title."<sup>3</sup>

Fleming lost no time in summarizing Cameron's conclusions and sending them to Lansdowne along with copies of all of Cameron's reports. Lansdowne acted promptly and sent

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 December 1887.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



the documents to the Colonial Office and to Sir Lionel West.<sup>1</sup> The question remained quiet for three months until mid-April when Fleming learned that the British Flag had been raised on Fanning, Christmas, and Penrhyn Islands. Governor General Lansdowne wrote to Fleming expressing hope that this action was the result of Fleming's calling attention to the importance of these islands.<sup>2</sup>

Major-General Cameron soon wrote to congratulate Fleming on the apparent success of the campaign to have the Pacific islands, investigated by Cameron, annexed by Great Britain. Cameron added "That the United States will have something *to say* is certain unless they have changed their character within the last week."<sup>3</sup> Cameron proved to be correct. Over the following ten years the United States would increasingly seek colonial possessions in the Pacific. With the possessions came a desire for cable communication which in the long run would prove to be the most serious threat to a British Pacific cable.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 194, Lansdowne to Fleming, 4 January 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 48, no. 328, Streatfield to Fleming, 20 April 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 48, Cameron to Fleming, May 8 1888.

<sup>4</sup>It is also interesting to note that although Great Britain continues to hold and administer Christmas and Penrhyn Islands to the present day, the United States still officially claims these Islands under the 1856 guano Act. Maps and diplomatic histories of the United States duly record the U.S. Claim. Britain's claim to Fanning Island was never contested.



The essential question in regard to Fleming and the annexation of the Pacific islands is the question of how much credit he deserved for the success of the venture. Admiral Wharton, Admiralty Hydrographer, undoubtedly also had worked for annexation personally and through individuals other than Fleming.<sup>1</sup> His later correspondence to Fleming urging annexation of other islands indicated that, in fact, he attributed much of the success to Fleming, who had the position to work through either the Government of Canada or the Governor General. The successful result of the 1888 venture prompted an impatient Fleming in 1894 to attempt an act of personal annexation of Necker Island on behalf of Great Britain in an attempt to further the Pacific cable scheme. Fleming increasingly assumed the role of a non-political imperialist, at times extremely impatient with the slow pace of both Canadian and Imperial administrators. The conception of a British Pacific cable in 1888 was the

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<sup>1</sup>For a study on the importance of the position of Admiralty Hydrographer and an assessment of Wharton's accomplishments see: G. S. Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart; British Naval Hydrography in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: 1970).





single cause of the island annexations by Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Sandford Fleming in April of 1888 was not in a position to appreciate the relative success of his efforts on behalf of the cable project. The deepest personal tragedy of his life had occurred in late March when his wife, Anne Jean, to whom he had been devoted, died after a brief illness. It took several weeks before Fleming once again began to gather the numerous aspects of the cable project into a pattern of activity. And then, as if to keep the recent tragedy from his mind, he threw himself into a period of intense activity and work, much of it oriented toward the Pacific cable.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As one author said in examining the history of the Pacific:

Once only did Great Britain move swiftly and purposefully to obtain island possessions. Urged by an inter-colonial conference, the home government acquired a number of central Pacific pin-point islands in preparation for the laying of a transpacific cable.

Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, p. 136; also see p. 332.

W. P. Morrell says the Admiralty acted to annex unoccupied Pacific islands for cable sites as a result of the 1887 Colonial Conference. The proposal of a Pacific cable "pressed on by the Canadian Government and especially by Sandford Fleming, gave a new importance to unoccupied islands which might serve as cable stations." Morrell, *Britain In The Pacific Islands*, pp. 264-65. Morrell and other authors mentioning the annexations certainly were unaware of Fleming's post-conference activities in Washington and through the Canadian Governor General on behalf of the island annexation.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, March-July 1888.



Throughout the early months of 1888 Fleming had been receiving replies and getting some favourable reaction from various quarters as a result of his personal letter and printed memorandum to the other colonies concerned with a Pacific cable. One of the earliest replies had come from Alfred Deakin, Premier of Victoria, who pledged the support of his government to the project but urged that the colonies should put pressure on Britain to join the scheme.<sup>1</sup> Deakin also agreed to exert pressure through the Colonial Office to force an Admiralty survey of the cable route.<sup>2</sup> Fleming also received support for his ideas from Sir Samuel Griffiths, Premier of Queensland. He used these indications to request more action on the matter of the survey from the Canadian government.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming's most valuable source of information on the state of official and public opinion in Australia and New Zealand came from Owen Jones, Fleming's former associate in the Pacific Cable Company. Jones had returned to New Zealand and Australia in late 1887. His intention had been to interview colonial governments in the interests of the Pacific Cable Company, as well as to pursue his own business interests. But his relationship with Want's Pacific Cable Company

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 12, no. 83, Deakin to Fleming, 9 January 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 26, no. 189, Victoria to Lord Knutsford, 7 March 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 15, no. 111, Fleming to G. E. Foster, 16 March 1888.



had been progressively deteriorating in the months following the London Colonial Conference. The result was that Jones appeared to be sending more accurate and detailed information about the state of affairs in the Pacific Colonies to Fleming than he sent to Want and associates.<sup>1</sup> He reported from Christchurch, New Zealand that, "I have lost no time in getting to work on your Cable Scheme."<sup>2</sup> Reaction on the part of the Premier, the Minister of Public Works, and the Head of the Telegraph Department in New Zealand was favourable to a cable scheme. As a result of Jones' visit the government cabled its representative, Sir William Fitzherbert, then attending a postal conference in Sydney, to press the issue. The result was a favourable resolution passed at the conference despite the work of the Eastern Associated Telegraph interests to prevent it.<sup>3</sup>

By March Jones was in Melbourne where the cable idea received an enthusiastic reception from the government. Jones assured Fleming that everyone favoured the general idea, but opinions differed widely on how it should be accomplished. Many Australians felt there should be Australian involvement in whatever company was formed. From Melbourne Jones wrote that in the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 11 December 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 February 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



future he intended to send only "guarded letters" to the Pacific Cable Company in London as "we *two* are in an awkward position with them. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Jones visited Sydney, New South Wales, the following week. He described it as a "hot bed of Pender interests." <sup>2</sup>

In Ottawa Fleming also found himself in a difficult position in the spring of 1888. Unknown to Fleming a report on the entire Pacific cable question to date had been requested from the Superintendent of Telegraphs, F. N. Gisborne. The intention was to summarize for the Canadian Privy Council's benefit all previous action on the question. Gisborne drafted his report in the late fall of 1887. It was accepted by the Council and sent to the Colonial Office with an Order-in-Council. <sup>3</sup> There is no indication of how Fleming learned of the existence of the Report or obtained a copy, but the reaction of the normally polite Fleming was strong. He drafted a letter to Tupper on the subject then changed his mind and saw Tupper personally. It can be assumed that the tone of their unrecorded conversation was similar to the letter which appealed to Tupper as the only Minister "who does understand." Fleming charged that the Gisborne Report which he had just discovered,

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 March 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 March 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 98, no. 19, (copy) Canada, Privy Council Report, No. 2468, 27 February 1888.





is exceedingly stupid and exceedingly mischievous and contains statements which are untrue. Had the report been made to the order of the Eastern Extension Company, it could not have been done better.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming feared that, sent with the sanction of the Canadian government, the Report might "*kill the project* or at least retard it for an indefinite number of years."<sup>2</sup> The following day Fleming wrote again to Tupper emphasizing the great harm the report, which was "absolutely untrue in several particulars . . . ," could do to the project.<sup>3</sup> Fleming charged also that Sir Hector Langevin completely misapprehended the situation regarding the cable. Fleming was certain to have pursued the subject further had the death of his wife not intervened.

F. N. Gisborne's Report on the Pacific Cable, to which Sandford Fleming so strenuously objected, contained a number of contentious points. It questioned Fleming's estimates of revenue and traffic over existing telegraph lines to Australasia. It ridiculed Fleming's proposal that at some future point these lines be taken over by the Imperial and colonial governments. Gisborne contended that the Pender interests would never accept such an offer. The report pointed out the advantages of a North Pacific cable (at great length over a Southern Pacific cable), which Gisborne

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vo.. 50, no. 349, Fleming to Tupper, (letter not sent) 20 March 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 March 1888.



stated he had first reported on in 1879. The movement for a Pacific cable direct from Canada to Australasia was only "a mere matter of sentiment" said Gisborne. This cable would be of greater length, involved American rivalry in the area, crossed waters unsuitable electrically for a cable due to coral reefs, extreme, uncharted depths, and volcanic activity. In summary, Gisborne argued the current scheme was not a feasible conception. If the government wished to pursue the matter, it should only do so in conjunction with the Australasian colonies.<sup>1</sup> Gisborne's position in the report convinced Fleming that Gisborne was the prime obstacle to the scheme within the Canadian government and Fleming's most persistent personal antagonist. However, the influence of the report never proved to be great. It was not widely circulated, and most of those who encountered the document probably had already formed an opinion on the scheme.

Once Fleming resumed work on the scheme, the negative attitude of the report tended to be offset by a series of positive developments. In March, proceedings of the 1887 London Colonial Conference relating to Imperial postal and telegraph communication had appeared as a Canadian Senate Blue Book.<sup>2</sup> Fleming's activities in London appeared in a

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 98, no. 19, Canada, Privy Council Report No. 2468, 27 February 1888.

<sup>2</sup>C.S.P., 1888, no. 76, 153 pp.



favourable light in this collection of papers. In early April the Admiralty, in connection with the annexation of Pacific islands, announced to the Colonial Office that the long awaited Pacific survey was underway.<sup>1</sup> The survey ship *H. M. Egeria* had been directed to proceed from New Zealand to Vancouver. Although a full survey would take two to three years, the *Egeria* voyage would "furnish gradually (at a minimum cost) the preliminary information required, and a great part of that directly bearing on the laying of a cable."<sup>2</sup> A more rapid survey was promised only when the Colonial Office could state that funds for the construction of the cable were definitely available.<sup>3</sup>

Prompted by these optimistic signs and backed by Jones' information of certain support from at least New Zealand, Victoria and Queensland, Fleming approached Tupper regarding a conference with the interested Australian Colonies. He suggested that a Canadian delegate be sent to Australia with an invitation for Australian leaders to return to Canada and discuss the entire situation.<sup>4</sup> This suggestion was considered, postponed, reconsidered and

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 26, no. 189, (copy) Admiralty to C.O., 4 April 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, C.O. to Tupper, 21 May 1888. (enclosure) Admiralty to C.O., 1 May 1888.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Fleming to Tupper (copy), 23 April 1888.



ultimately adopted by the Canadian government, and required great effort on Fleming's part. The culmination of this effort was the 1894 Ottawa Conference to consider Imperial trade and communication facilities especially in the Pacific basin.

A. J. Wharton wrote to Fleming in early May, 1888, providing details of the *Egeria* voyage and of the annexation of the Pacific islands requested by Fleming through Lord Lansdowne. Wharton was convinced that there were

some similar steps that might be taken in the interests of the telegraph cable that we both believe will come . . . all islands that can possibly be required should be acquired to prevent others from taking them.<sup>1</sup>

He requested Fleming to have the islands annexed if possible. If the cable were to touch at the Sandwich Islands, possession of Washington, Palmyra, and possibly the Phoenix Group would be essential. In this matter Wharton soon requested Fleming to delay taking action because the Colonial Office "asked me not to advocate Colonial intervention until they had time to look into the question."<sup>2</sup> Apparently the Admiralty had sent a strong expression of opinion "that every step should be at once taken to secure possession of every island that may by any possibility be required for a cable."<sup>3</sup> There were inevitable delays as the various

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 53, no. 365, Wharton to Fleming, 2 May 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 May 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*





concerned bureaucracies pondered the situation, but the eventual result was another series of Pacific island annexations in 1889 primarily for the purposes of a Pacific cable to Australasia.

A fitting summary of Fleming's activities in regard to the Pacific cable project in the eventful years 1887-1888 was contained in a lengthy letter from Fleming to Lord Stanley, the newly appointed Canadian Governor General. Stanley was destined to become a firm advocate of Fleming's proposal. He had a good background in Colonial affairs, having served as Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1885-1886. After outlining the results of the Colonial Conference, the struggle for a survey of the cable route, and the question of the annexation of certain Pacific islands, Fleming stressed the opposition presented to the scheme at all levels by the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. Fleming stated the belief, formed over the preceding two years, that no private company should impede the general interests of the Empire. He stated, "The principle is clearly established that private interests must yield to public good."<sup>1</sup>

A picture of a cable scheme emerged from Fleming's detailed letter to Lord Stanley, which in most respects closely resembled the 1902 cable. Fleming believed that the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Fleming to Lord Stanley, 28 June 1888 (copy) to Tupper, 9 July 1888. This idea of government takeover of private interests with compensation at a fair price was first expressed by Fleming at the Colonial Conference and in a 26 September 1887 Memorandum.



project should be operated as a public work under the direction of a joint Empire Commission. Imperial credit could then be used in financing the project on the order of the loans extended to the Canadian Intercolonial Railway in 1867. Fleming also saw a Pacific cable as only one section of an Empire system of cables--the existing cables to be removed from private control.<sup>1</sup> Fleming never deviated far from these general objectives during the ensuing 14-year struggle to bring the cable scheme to fruition.

Fleming emphasized to Stanley the wholehearted support given the idea by Lord Lansdowne, the former Governor General. What was now needed, Fleming felt, was a series of meetings between Canadian and Australian delegates leading to a general conference on the subject. He hoped that Lord Stanley would see fit to support efforts to promote a conference on the subject. In reply Fleming received a letter from the Governor General's Secretary which stated that "the proper constitutional course to take on the matter . . ." had not yet been determined. However, "his Excellency's sympathies are very much in accord with your proposal."<sup>2</sup> Lord Stanley proved to be a valuable ally in Fleming's effort to promote a Pacific cable.

The preceding two years had been very eventful for Fleming in regard to a Pacific cable. Certainly, positive

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 3, no. 15, J. Bagot to Fleming, 5 July 1888.



accomplishments could be credited to his efforts. Canadian recognition of the importance of the scheme led to Fleming's selection as a delegate to the 1887 Colonial Conference. The conference itself had allowed Fleming a forum for expressing his ideas. It had also enabled him to make valuable contacts with influential leaders of both business and government from other parts of the Empire, especially Australia and New Zealand. The general acceptance of his ideas by these men caused him to intensify his efforts from Canada to promote closer Canadian-Australasian ties.

The experience of the conference had shown Fleming where the centers of opposition to his ideas lay. The Eastern Telegraph Company and its Associated Companies wielded massive influence at all levels of the British and colonial administrations. The extent of this influence and its subtle uses were something which Fleming had yet to thoroughly investigate. It was pervasive enough to cause Fleming to shift his outlook fundamentally in the basic question of public versus private ownership. He had supported some projects such as the Intercolonial Railway, which were state operated. He had never before advocated government takeover of private business operations. The Eastern Extension Company's opposition led him to feel that no arrangement or cooperation could ever be possible, thus nationalization was the only answer. Nationalization was not a popular position to take in the Victorian business world of 1887. It is to Fleming's credit that he could advocate





such an idea and still retain the respect and influence of those around him in business and government. In Australia and New Zealand this idea proved to be quite popular and Fleming gained support by its advocacy.

Success had also greeted Fleming's efforts to have Great Britain annex Fanning, Christmas, and Penrhyn Islands as potential cable stations. The actions taken by the Admiralty, Foreign Office, and Colonial Office in this question proved them to be extremely conservative and slow to act on colonial schemes. On the question of a survey of the cable route Fleming had seen limited efforts made, but regarded the gradual survey program as far too slow. Fleming regarded progress in this area as essential to the scheme and he devoted immense efforts in this direction in ensuing years.

Fleming's most difficult and sometimes puzzling problem as revealed during this period was the hesitant attitude of the Macdonald Government. His appointment as a Delegate to the Colonial Conference and efforts to promote a survey by the Macdonald Ministry seemed to indicate support. It appeared at times as if Macdonald viewed a Pacific cable as part of a broader expansion into the Pacific basin, where his government and the C.P.R. had made efforts to promote shipping and business. Fleming's experience matched those of many other people. Interviews with Macdonald and his Cabinet produced promises of lavish aid and support, but the official action seldom was





forthcoming. Sir Charles Tupper and the Governors General remained Fleming's most valuable contacts within the Canadian government. F. N. Gisborne in 1887 had clearly shown himself to be Fleming's most persistent Canadian antagonist. Gisborne seemed able to make his opinion felt at the most inopportune moments for Fleming's scheme.

Fleming emerged from the year following the Colonial Conference as an advocate of a state-owned and operated Pacific cable in the South Pacific, possibly touching at the Sandwich Islands. He had formed friendships and contacts in Australia and New Zealand, through which he sought to exert pressure on the colonial governments and through them upon the Imperial government. Work in this connection convinced him of the need for Canadian delegates to Australia, possibly Canadian representatives in Australia and New Zealand and ultimately a conference of these colonies. In this connection he soon found a personal trip to the area necessary. Improved inter-Imperial telegraphic communication, especially among the British colonies with direct access to the Pacific, emerged as Fleming's major objective in his Imperial activities during this period.



## CHAPTER VI

### PACIFIC HORIZON

Communication between Canada and the British colonies in Australia and New Zealand remained expensive and infrequent in the late 1880's. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway had raised Canadian hopes of improved communication links across the Pacific. When this came in 1889 in the form of a monthly steamship service between Vancouver and Hong Kong, the passage was expensive and time-consuming. A more direct route for mail and passengers to the Australasian colonies from Canada was by way of a steamship service operating out of San Francisco and going via the Hawaiian Islands. This service, however, required a period of at least six weeks for a round trip. A Canadian-Australian steamship service was established in 1893 between Sydney and Vancouver. This service received a Canadian government subsidy.

Communication between Canada and Australasia by telegraph could be effected via London within a matter of hours, but the cost of its use was prohibitively expensive and entailed other serious limitations. Telegraph and cable lines between Montreal and London were controlled entirely by American telegraph companies. Even the Canadian Pacific



Telegraph business from central and western Canada was transmitted through the United States to the maritime cables.<sup>1</sup> Between London and Australia the telegraph cables were largely under the control of the monopolistic British-owned Eastern Telegraph Company and its various subsidiaries including the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. The lines of this system touched Portuguese territory at Lisbon, passed through Egypt at the Isthmus of Suez, and crossed Dutch territory on Java. The other sections of the line including the long line across India were securely under British control. British telegraphers operated the system throughout and to insure effective service the cables were either duplicated or triplicated as far as Australia. A single cable extended to New Zealand. This telegraph system with land lines in Egypt, across India and across Australia from Darwin to Adelaide, was 7,425 miles in length.<sup>2</sup> The Eastern system's cables in the shallow seas off Java were subject to frequent interruption due to earthquake and volcanic eruption. In addition, the land line across Australia was frequently interrupted by natural phenomena such as flood and wind. The London *Times* cited the cost of telegraphing to Australia from Britain as 9s. 4d. a word which

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 23, no. 162, C. Hosmer (Mgr. C.P.R. Telegraphs) to Fleming, 28 May 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 48, no. 328, W. J. Wharton, Admiralty Hydrographer, "Report by the Hydrographer on a proposal to connect Vancouver Island and New Zealand by a Submarine Telegraph Cable," 28 February 1887.



"has been found to be prohibitive for all but the most urgent necessity. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This was over four years after the *Sydney Morning Herald* had described the ordinary rate as being 10s. 8d. a word in addition to an annual subsidy of £32,400 paid by South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. In spite of the subsidy the newspaper article argued that "it is only through the newspapers that the masses will be reminded that the international cables exist at all." <sup>2</sup> Any telegraphic business from Canada was faced with the additional cost of using the American-controlled Atlantic cables. Cheapened cost and an end to a monopolistic control of British empire telegraphy were two of the most apparent reasons favouring a Pacific cable. Fleming argued that a Pacific cable would be in total nearly the same length as the Eastern system but could operate at much reduced rates and would be relatively secure from interruption. Sir John Pender, Director of the Eastern system, was persistent in his efforts to discredit a Pacific cable, which

would be inimical to the interests of the telegraphing public, as it would inevitably lead to a war of tariffs, which would eventually impoverish both the Pacific and the existing cables, and result in a strained and inefficient service. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>London, *Times*, "Australian Telegraph Rates," 20 June 1890.

<sup>2</sup>*Sydney, Morning Herald*, 4 March 1886.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 21, no. 151, H. Finch Hatton, "Memorandum on the Proposed Pacific Cable from Vancouver Island to Australia," 8 March 1887.





The two major problems preventing any immediate progress on the cable apparent to Sandford Fleming and other men interested in the Pacific cable were: the lack of progress on the Admiralty survey of the Pacific route; and the hesitation of the Macdonald government to take action either in appointing a representative or to establish permanent liaison with the Australasian colonies. Fleming summarized the first problem for the benefit of his friend Sir Charles Tupper, once again residing in London as Canadian High Commissioner. Fleming wrote:

The orders issued by the Admiralty and their resolution (apparently) to do as little as possible and to take as long as possible to do that little, leads me to fear that their determination if persisted in will practically succeed in making the establishment of the Pacific Cable impracticable.<sup>1</sup>

The information at Fleming's disposal in regard to the Admiralty was normally provided by the Hydrographer A. J. Wharton, who was not personally in favour of a Pacific cable, but on whose behalf Fleming had acted in the matter of the Pacific island annexations. Fleming explored numerous avenues in efforts to exert influence to alter the slow Admiralty survey policy--all to no avail.<sup>2</sup> The Admiralty continued to be singularly unimpressed by colonial demands and pressures

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Fleming to Tupper, 11 July 1888.

<sup>2</sup>As an example, in June 1889, Fleming wrote to Macdonald pointing out that the cable would be needed to supplement the planned Canadian Pacific steamers. Macdonald passed it on to Tupper requesting him to do something in the matter of the Survey. Tupper Papers, vol. 8, pp. 4073-75, Fleming to Macdonald, 18 June 1889.



for progress on a Pacific survey.<sup>1</sup> This continued opposition led Fleming's friend and associate in the Imperial Federation League, George R. Parkin, to speculate on the extent of the influence of the Eastern Telegraph Company within Admiralty offices.<sup>2</sup>

The other major problem, that of persuading the Canadian government to take interest in improved liaison between Canada and the Australian colonies, was far easier for Fleming to grasp and exert influence. His efforts, however, were not initially any more rewarding despite a great deal of effort. The Macdonald ministry during the winter of 1888 and throughout 1889 was beset with a multitude of serious problems which detracted from interest in a scheme as embryonic as the Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> Within Canada it was due entirely to Fleming's persistence that the idea appeared in the public eye from time to time. Interviews in Canadian newspapers such as that in the *Ottawa Citizen* of October 13, 1888, and public speaking engagements before such groups as

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Admiralty to C.O., 23 October 1889; also see Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 11 November 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 270, George R. Parkin (from Australia) to Fleming, 9 May 1889.

<sup>3</sup>Among the most serious questions occupying attention in this period were Imperial Federation, Commercial Union, Reciprocity, the Jesuit Estates Question, hints of scandal and impropriety, and internal pressures within the Conservative Party. See: Peter B. Waite, "A Question of Identity 1888-1891," *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto: 1971), pp. 200-28.



Chambers of Commerce, branches of the Imperial Federation League, and the Royal Society kept the idea prominently alive.<sup>1</sup>

The proposal for a Pacific cable, refined and tempered by years of work by Fleming, was in essence a reaction to the opposition encountered to the scheme. Fleming wrote to Tupper:

Owing to the position taken by the Home Government with respect to the Eastern Extension Telegraph Coy. there is but one mode of carrying out the project viz to constitute the undertaking an Imperial-Intercolonial public work, to be carried out by a Board of Commissioners, taking over at its fair value the property of the existing Company.<sup>2</sup>

Through Lord Stanley, Fleming's idea for a meeting of Canadian and Australian representatives was referred to the Privy Council but no action was taken.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to influence the decision, Prime Minister Macdonald was contacted by a number of individuals interested in a Canadian-Australian meeting for purposes of trade and the Pacific cable. Among these were C. Van Horne, Owen Jones, Fleming, George Stephen, Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Leonard Tilley, each of whom apparently was to "have a go at Sir John" to induce him to send invitations to the Australian colonies for a

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary 1889 and 1890.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 68, Fleming to Tupper, 9 July 1888.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 48, no. 328, Lord Stanley to Fleming, 30 July 1888.



conference.<sup>1</sup> But Sir John A. Macdonald faced serious economic problems with the United States and resisted all the pressures and refused to take any immediate action in the matter, a state of affairs which caused considerable disappointment to Owen Jones when Fleming cabled the decision. "I cannot tell you how disappointed I was when I received your wire, it really looks as if 'Old Tomorrow' intended putting us off, is there no other way of going at him, . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The effort had convinced Macdonald of the need for a meeting of Canadian and Australian representatives regarding trade and communication facilities. Donald Creighton credits the severity of economic problems with the United States as the reason for Macdonald's hesitation to act:

Altogether there were half a dozen problems in trade, transport, and communications which Macdonald still had to keep regretfully in the category of unfinished business. He was still interested in a Pacific cable and a subsidized steamship service from Vancouver to Australasia and the Far East; . . .<sup>3</sup>

Within six weeks, however, the situation had altered sufficiently to allow Macdonald to give attention to a number of deferred matters--among them the Australasian conference. On November 13, 1888, Order-in-Council #2438 was passed, inviting representatives from Australia and New Zealand to a

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Owen Jones to Fleming, 17 August 1888; 7 September 1888; and 12 September 1888.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 September 1888.

<sup>3</sup>Creighton, *Old Chieftain*, p. 511.





conference regarding trade and telegraphic communication.<sup>1</sup>  
 Macdonald, in addition, wrote to Tupper in extremely favourable terms regarding the cable scheme and Fleming's involvement and requested Tupper to pursue the matter with the Australasian and New Zealand Agents-General in London.<sup>2</sup>

Tupper and the other colonial representatives in London planned a large public meeting for November 22 at the Cannon Street Hotel to openly discuss "the extremely unsatisfactory state of the existing Cable communication between England and Australasia" which, so advertisements read, "is injurious to trade, and would be a source of great danger to Imperial interests in time of war."<sup>3</sup> Owen Jones reported to Fleming that the meeting at which Donald Smith "got out of a sick bed and spoke to great effect" was well attended by merchants and bankers in addition to the colonial Agents.<sup>4</sup> Jones also sent to Fleming a copy of a printed statement distributed to newspapers immediately prior to the meeting by the Eastern Telegraph Company, whose stated intention was to correct the false impression created by the exaggerated and misleading

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 98, no. 19, Register of O.C. and C.O. Correspondence re: Pacific cable prepared by Fleming, n.d.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 14 November 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 118, no. 34, "Report of The Pacific Telegraph Conference," London, 1888.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 22 November 1888.



statements circulated prior to the Conference.<sup>1</sup> Jones claimed that the meeting drew public notice in Britain to the problem and "had the effect of knocking Pender's shares down, the very first sign of public opinion, and the first good slap in the face he has received from us."<sup>2</sup>

Fleming in Ottawa was more concerned that the projected meeting with the Australian colonial delegates regarding trade and telegraph matters should be a success. He wrote to Macdonald stressing the importance of having a delegate from each of the Australian colonies--even those such as South Australia which had heavy liabilities toward the Eastern Extension Company and could be counted upon to oppose a conference. Fleming reiterated his proposal to take over at a fair valuation the existing cable system on the basis of "calculations on which I stake my reputation."<sup>3</sup> He firmly believed that a Pacific cable could be brought into being based on lower rates and at no additional cost to the Australasian colonies.

Earliest replies to the Canadian initiative regarding a conference were received in February and March, 1889.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 38, no. 273, Eastern Telegraph Company (printed letter) 21 November 1888. To Fleming's copy someone added a statement saying that: "No one but a skunk would have circulated this, and not to give us a chance to reply before the meeting however it has done us no end of good and it was a grand success."

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 177, Jones to Fleming, 29 November 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald (copy) 24 November 1888.



The Australian colonies at first replied individually and then presented a unanimous opinion that any such conference must be held in Australia rather than Canada. The Canadian Pacific steamship service in the Pacific was now underway and Macdonald was prepared to make concessions regarding the location of a trade and communication conference. Creighton described Macdonald's mood during this period as follows:

The Canadian east-west commercial system, transcontinental and transoceanic in extent, with terminals in Europe on the one hand and the Far East on the other, was a great undertaking which he had not yet strengthened and extended as much as he had hoped to do.<sup>1</sup>

In early July, 1889, Macdonald selected J. J. C. Abbott, a Minister without portfolio, to head the Canadian delegation at a conference now tentatively planned for Australia. Sandford Fleming had hoped, and many of his friends had expected, that he would be included as a member of the Canadian delegation to Australia. Macdonald wrote to Fleming in early August and described what had happened when Fleming's name had been considered in Council to take part in the delegation. He explained that "perhaps correctly" Council thought that Fleming's connection with the Pacific Cable Company would be against his appearing in Australia on a government commission.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Creighton, *Old Chieftian*, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 7 August 1889. This was the Pacific Cable Company which had been organized in 1886 prior to the Colonial Conference. Its name was still registered in Britain but in four years had made no discernible progress in promoting a Pacific cable as a private commercial development.



Sandford Fleming replied to John A. Macdonald in a very carefully phrased letter. Fleming emphasized that he was pleased that Macdonald had considered him for the delegation and that in fact he had looked forward to going since he had given more attention to the matter than most people. Fleming then strongly emphasized that since 1887 and his appointment as a Canadian delegate to the Colonial Conference, "Believe me I have not had the remotest connection with any Cable Company from that day until the present." He stressed that he had worked continuously for the idea of a Pacific cable, "But my aims and efforts have been directed to a great public end not the promotion of any company."<sup>1</sup> Fleming hoped that Macdonald would endeavor to correct the Council's impression of his activities.

A further delay in the proposed conference occurred because Macdonald:

had realized that the Australian political timetable differed markedly from the Canadian, that the Australian legislatures would all be in session during the autumn, and that the Abbott 'expedition' to the Antipodes would have to be postponed until the early spring of 1890 by which time, it was hoped, the Canadian Parliament would be prorogued.<sup>2</sup>

Abbott used the period of delay to familiarize himself with the problems of communication and trade between Canada and Australia. He was soon made aware that a survey of the projected route in the Pacific was an essential aspect of the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Macdonald (copy), 9 August 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Creighton, *The Old Chieftian*, p. 527.







scheme if it was to proceed. Abbott informed Tupper,

that our Government is interesting itself about this cable, purely as a national matter, in which we venture to think the mother country is as much concerned as ourselves, and not in any way or degree in connection with any private project or interest.<sup>1</sup>

Tupper made one further request for a survey from the Colonial Office--this for a survey from Vancouver to Hawaii.<sup>2</sup>

Uncharacteristically the Admiralty replied promptly. The reply was an echo of replies to similar requests over the previous half dozen years: "The survey was proceeding gradually according to plan and any deviation would be impracticable."<sup>3</sup>

Sir Charles Tupper kept Fleming supplied with copies of significant correspondence and general information regarding a Pacific cable.<sup>4</sup> One reason for this was that it was Fleming who apparently kept the government informed about developments which potentially could pose threats to the cable scheme. One such threat which had been slowly building over the past two years and which now loomed large was the threat of American interests gaining exclusive cable landing rights in the Hawaiian Islands. Hawaii was viewed

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Abbott to Tupper, 24 September 1889.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Tupper to C.O., 30 September 1889.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Admiralty to C.O. (M2645), 23 October 1889.

<sup>4</sup>As an example see: Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 11 November 1889.



as essential as a relay station for a Pacific cable. In 1889 it was felt to be impractical to lay cables of much more than 2,000 miles in a single span due to the diminished capacity of a long cable to effectively carry the electrical impulses required to produce the signal. Thus a relay station in the Hawaiian Islands was essential. The next possible site for a relay station was over 1,000 miles further south-west from the Hawaiian chain.

Fleming outlined his assessment of the project in a letter to Hector Langevin, Minister of Public Works, in September, 1889. It was now apparent that Fleming would not have a part in the delegation to Australia. It also appeared to Fleming that: "Several years will probably elapse before the Australian, Canadian and British Governments come to any definite arrangements for carrying out the proposal."<sup>1</sup> In the meantime Fleming urged the Canadian government to complete the Vancouver to Hawaii section of the cable. This would have the effect of shutting American interests from San Francisco out of the Islands; the remainder of the Pacific cable could then be finished when agreement was reached with the Australian colonies. This was a slight revision of ideas expressed earlier in the summer to Langevin when it had looked as if a Canadian delegation might soon be going to Australia. Fleming at that time had estimated the cost of the Vancouver to Hawaii section of the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin (copy) 14 September 1889.



cable at \$2 million.<sup>1</sup>

Specific Canadian action in regard to Hawaii came in September 1889 when Sir Charles Tupper reported to Macdonald that Abbott had met with the Australian Agents-General in London. During this meeting:

at Mr. Abbott's insistance we all signed a letter to the Colonial Minister asking the prompt intervention of Her majesty's Government to prevent Hawaii giving an exclusive right to an American Company to land cables, and I have received a copy of a paper marked 'very confidential' saying that Lord Salisbury had sent a very strong protest.<sup>2</sup>

While Canadian interest in Hawaii emerged as part of a general intended expansion of Macdonald's "National Policy", commercial contact between the two areas had not assumed any measure of importance. The value of Canadian trade in the Pacific and with the Kingdom of Hawaii was still only a small fraction of the economic value of United States' interest.<sup>3</sup>

A key point in Fleming's involvement in Hawaii was his meeting in 1889 with Clarence W. Ashford, Canadian born Attorney General of the Kingdom. Ashford visited the United

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 July 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 8, p. 4124, Tupper to Macdonald, 30 September 1889.

<sup>3</sup>For an interpretative study of Canadian-Hawaiian relations during this period see: Merze Tate, "Canada's Interest in the Trade and Sovereignty of Hawaii," *C.H.R.*, XLIX (no. 1, March 1963), 20-42. Tate's article is the only one dealing with the subject but it must be used with caution as his research has led him to make some apparently questionable conclusions.



States in 1889 in connection with commercial negotiations underway between the United States and Hawaii. He apparently visited Canada at the request of Macdonald and thereafter became an opponent of close American-Hawaiian commercial ties and a supporter of a Pacific cable and closer Canadian economic connections.<sup>1</sup>

Ashford while in Ottawa presented Sir Hector Langevin with a personal "Memorandum *in re* a Pacific Cable between Canada and Australia, *via* Hawaii," which summarized the existing situation and recommended immediate action ". . . from the standpoint of British Interests in the Pacific." The Memorandum gave a detailed account of the terms under which the Hawaiian Government had in 1887, given a three year monopoly on cable landing rights to Audley Coote of Hobart, Tasmania. Coote had failed to make any progress on a cable and in anticipation of his lease expiring a group of Hawaiian and American entrepreneurs had begun to organize a "Pacific Cable Company" for the purpose of constructing a

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<sup>1</sup>Merze Tate states that: "This policy aroused suspicion in the Hawaiian capital that he was under the pay of the Canadian Pacific Railway, if not an agent of the Canadian prime minister." *Ibid.*, 29. Tate documents Ashford's definite change in attitude but could find no proof of Canadian involvement. The Fleming Papers shed no light on this question but from December 1889 until after the American supported revolution deposed the Hawaiian Monarchy, Sandford Fleming engaged in a regular personal correspondence with Ashford. Through this means he was able to keep in touch with developments in Hawaii and in the United States to which the Canadian Government did not have official access. Ashford in addition sent Fleming copies of "Confidential" Documents and Reports dealing with affairs in Hawaii related to cable communication.





cable from California via the Hawaiian Islands to Japan. Ashford stressed that unless the British exerted pressure nothing stood in the way of this group acquiring cable landing rights when Coote's charter expired. The effect of this "would be to exclude England from the privilege of utilizing that most convenient and desirable, if not absolutely necessary spot in the ocean, as a resting point for her cables."<sup>1</sup> Ashford also believed that:

The trade of Hawaii can be made to follow, to a great extent, the Cable, if the Cable came to Canada; but should the California Coast secure the first, (or exclusive) Cable connection with Hawaii, such fact, I believe, would so far cement the existing Commercial and Political relations between the two countries as to long defer, if not to extinguish the hope of transferring such advantages to Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Ashford concluded by outlining the financial basis upon which a Canada to Hawaii cable could be laid--statistics which he credited to Sandford Fleming. Privately, Ashford informed Fleming that he hoped the views in the "Memorandum" would be made known to the British government through the Governor General.

The Canadian High Commissioner in London had in the interim been informed by the Colonial Office that the Hawaiian government would not again grant exclusive cable landing privileges to any one group. Another group had begun to

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 3, no. 13, "Memorandum" enclosed with a letter, Ashford to Fleming, 20 December 1889.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



organize during this period in Hawaii under the name of the Hawaii Pacific Cable Company. Ashford, writing from the Hawaiian Legation in Washington, suggested that Fleming should work to organize a "Canadian Pacific Cable Company, or a "Canadian and Southern Pacific Cable Company." He even sent a sample draft charter of such a company which would be acceptable under Hawaiian law.<sup>1</sup> A private company was not the ideal way in which to organize the cable, Fleming believed. He outlined his views to Ashford as well as cautioning him against undue enthusiasm in anticipation of Canadian government activity--the difficulties currently facing the government were too serious.<sup>2</sup> These same problems also prevented the Abbott mission to Australia from taking shape. "Macdonald had planned a fairly early opening, [of Parliament] in the hope that Abbott would be free to depart on his Australian mission about the end of March . . . but it became impossible."<sup>3</sup>

Fleming continued to work for the cable to Hawaii but indications from Australia indicated that there would be little chance of serious cooperation on the part of the Australian colonies until they could unite in some sort of

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 8, no. 13, Ashford to Fleming, 4 January and 7 January 1890.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 February 1890.

<sup>3</sup>Creighton, *Old Chieftian*, p. 533.



federation.<sup>1</sup> This development in Australia would more than any other be responsible for the future delay in achieving a Pacific cable. Fleming still had hopes that the northern section of the cable from Vancouver to Hawaii might become a reality. In February, 1890, he submitted a "Memorandum in reference to the Pacific Cable" to Langevin. This proposal developed in minute detail three possible ways in which a cable to Hawaii could be completed: A) as a public work; B) as a private company with Canadian government support; C) as a company with subsidies from Hawaii and Canada.<sup>2</sup> The Conservative Canadian government had pressing matters of greater priority than a cable to Hawaii, and Fleming's detailed work was ignored.

The work done by Sandford Fleming on behalf of a Pacific cable scheme within the realm of government officials and government agencies was only one facet of his activity. Another aspect of his work, an increasingly important aspect in the 1890's, was Fleming's efforts to publicize the Pacific cable through the press and organizations such as the Imperial Federation League, Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, and the Royal Society. The methods used most commonly by Fleming involved speeches to concerned organizations

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 15, no. 108, Fleming to Lord Knutsford, 26 June 1890.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin, 17 February 1890.



which usually were followed by a resolution of support passed by the particular group concerned. The resolution would then be communicated to some level of government. In regard to press coverage Fleming used letters to the editors of major British, Canadian and Australian newspapers, "public letters" to prominent government officials which were released to the press, and numerous interviews and occasional articles in journals. The cumulative result of this activity was to make Fleming well known throughout the English speaking portion of the British Empire and to keep the Pacific cable a current topic of discussion.

The summer and fall of 1890 were periods when Fleming's activities in using the press to publicize the cable scheme and combat the influence of the Eastern Extension graph Company, can be easily examined. The suggestion to mount a campaign to draw public attention to the need for a Pacific cable came in this instance from George Parkin in London. He wrote to Fleming in July pointing out that recent earthquakes near Java had once again interrupted cable communication with Australia. Parkin felt that this would be an ideal time to draw attention to the idea of a Pacific cable as: "It will be regarded as a most serious question in Australia, where they are nervously anxious about this connection with England."<sup>1</sup> At this particular time Fleming was working closely with the Imperial Federation League

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 38, no. 270, Parkin to Fleming, 28 July 1890.





The Imperial Federation League had been a powerful organization in support of measures offering closer imperial relationships. Fleming had worked within the organization in Canada and in Britain to secure backing for a British Pacific cable. The organization had also been active in the years since the 1887 Conference in opposition to additional long term agreements for cable service to Australia with the Eastern Telegraph Company and its subsidiaries. The League and Fleming believed that such agreements would make the creation of any alternative line of communication more difficult. At the time of Parkin's suggestion regarding cable publicity, Fleming was in London on private business interests with the Hudson's Bay Company. He had already embroiled himself in opposition to a proposal which was before British colonial authorities that Britain should extend current subsidy agreements for cable service provided by the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. With the personal support of Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Donald Smith, Fleming put his opinion in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Knutsford.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, June 26 to 30, 1890; also vol. 15, no. 108, 26 June 1890; C.O. 42, 335/18, no. 12411, 26 June 1890. The proposals of John Pender's Eastern Extension Telegraph Company were for cable rates per word to Australia from London to be reduced from 9s, 4d. to 5s. in return for a guarantee from the governments concerned to repay one-half of the loss incurred by the company under the new rates. The Company would continue to receive £32,400 per year as a subsidy. Final approval for any such agreements rested with the British Government. These details are from *The Adelaide Observer*, 24 May 1890, p. 30.



Copies of Fleming's letter to Lord Knutsford regarding the cable subsidy question were widely circulated among interested individuals in London and later in the Australian colonies. These views so impressed A. H. Loring, Secretary of the Imperial Federation League in London, that he suggested that the letter be sent to the Editor of the *Times*.<sup>1</sup> Fleming acted promptly and in a covering letter he informed the *Times* Editor that the letter "fairly expresses the Canadian view of the case," a view confirmed by Sir Charles Tupper.<sup>2</sup>

This type of activity on Fleming's part was not always directly successful. In this instance his letter was never printed by the *Times*.<sup>3</sup> Such actions taken repeatedly by Fleming increased his personal reputation as an imperialist and occasionally produced unexpected benefits. The attention drawn to the matter in July 1890 led to a lengthy personal interview appearing in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The interview contained no novel ideas from Fleming but rather

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 23, no. 167, Loring to Fleming, 30 June and 7 July 1890. In addition Loring discussed the views with Lord Rosebury who concurred with the suggested action.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 30, no. 209, Fleming to *Times* Editor, 8 July and 12 July 1890. Fleming sent the same letter to eight other newspapers in Britain, carefully pointing out in each instance that, "I have no connection whatever with the Pacific Cable Company."

<sup>3</sup>An article in the *Leeds Mercury*, 21 July 1890, alleged that Sir John Pender's influence kept Fleming's letters from being printed in the London papers. Copy in *Ibid.*, vol. 8, no. 50, 24 September 1890.



emphasized the history of the Pacific cable scheme and his personal involvement with it. Fleming especially stressed the problems which would threaten the scheme if the current subsidy agreements with the Eastern Telegraph Companies were renewed.<sup>1</sup> Actions such as these publicizing the Pacific cable and countering the moves of its opponents, repeated scores of times over the ensuing decade would be a major factor in producing the public support for a Pacific cable so earnestly sought by Sandford Fleming.

Political leaders, organizations and newspapers in Australia were not ignored by Fleming in his quest to publicize the Pacific cable scheme. The method frequently used in this area, as in July 1890, was to have copies of relevant correspondence and newspaper articles printed at his own personal expense. In the instance under examination the correspondence regarding the proposed Eastern Extension cable subsidy and the *Times* article on Empire cables were sent to each of the Premiers of the Australian colonies under the title, "Telegraphy Between England and Australia." In a covering letter Fleming pointed out the advantages to the colonies of government ownership of empire cables as well as the great need for alternative lines of communication, as the recent cable interruptions off the Java coast so

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<sup>1</sup>*Gazette*, "England And The Australian Cables,"  
24 July 1890, p. 1.



graphically demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> Fleming terminated a busy summer of activity in London with a pleasant August voyage to Canada in the company of the Earl of Aberdeen,<sup>2</sup> who became Governor General of Canada in 1893 and was a staunch supporter of Fleming's activities to improve imperial communication. During his years in Canada key developments would take place to make the Pacific cable a potential reality.

From within Canada Fleming's campaign to publicize the cable project was greatly aided by a number of prominent individuals. One of the most active during this period was Sir Alexander Campbell, Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, with whom Fleming attended the 1887 Colonial Conference. In September 1890, shortly after Fleming's return to Canada, Campbell wrote requesting more information on the subject of cables. He stressed at that time that he was attempting to get Premier Oliver Mowat interested in the subject "as he could get the assistance of the press here," especially the *Globe* and the *Empire* of Toronto. Campbell urged Fleming to concentrate on the history and the background to get Canadians generally acquainted with the subject.<sup>3</sup> Campbell wrote again two weeks later congratulating

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 15, no. 108, 28 July 1890. An earthquake on July 18 broke all cables to Australia which was isolated telegraphically from the rest of the world for ten days.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Sir Charles Tupper to Fleming, 13 August 1890.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 8, no. 50, Sir Alexander Campbell to Fleming, 12 September 1890.







Fleming on New Zealand's decision to stop subsidies to the Eastern Extension Company. Campbell felt Fleming's work in London during the summer had much to do with this decision.<sup>1</sup> Campbell's own work was rewarded in October when both the *Globe* and the *Empire* printed lengthy articles on the history and background of the Pacific cable scheme. Both newspapers gave Fleming full credit for work on the project. The *Empire* urged that public opinion throughout the empire should rise to support this worthy public project. The *Globe*, which supported the idea generally, could not resist a bit of partisan politics by adding that Canada's Pacific trade could be increased with government policies which aided rather than hindered commerce.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming appreciated support for the cable project from influential men such as Campbell and spent a great amount of time in writing lengthy letters to keep them informed of developments. Such letters often reveal better than any other source the firm opinions Fleming held regarding the importance of the British Empire and Canada's position within the Empire. He foresaw Canada facing new horizons and new problems, especially in the Pacific. One of the problems was "the development of commerce in the Pacific and one of the most potent agents is a telegraph to

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 September 1890.

<sup>2</sup>"A Cable Line To Australia," *The Empire*, 1 October 1890; and "The Proposed Pacific Cable," *The Globe*, 28 October 1890.



our Sister Colonies."<sup>1</sup> Fleming regretted the lack of Canadian agents in Australia to work on behalf of Canadian interests and offset the powerful influence of the Pender cable companies in the colonies. Because of this situation, "The mischief may indeed be done well before she is even aware of it,"<sup>2</sup> a point Fleming had recently stressed to Sir John A. Macdonald.

Fleming had written to Macdonald that the interests opposed to Canada in Australia were "strong, energetic and unscrupulous," while Canada had no voice and no ready means of communication to offset these influences.<sup>3</sup> Macdonald replied that Tupper in London had been instructed to "continue his exertions to prevent Sir John Pender getting hold of those Colonies"; in the interim Canada would have to rely on the agents of Canadian mercantile houses in Australia.<sup>4</sup> According to Macdonald, Canada would only be in a position to appoint "quasi consuls [*sic*]" if and when Australian federation took place.

Fleming wanted more definite action. In November and December, he contacted Macdonald and other Cabinet

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 8, no. 50, Fleming to Campbell, 24 September 1890.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Fleming to Macdonald, 20 September 1890.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 31, no. 216, Macdonald to Fleming, 17 October 1890.



members including Edgar Dewdney and Hector Langevin, to press for Canada to take the incentive in the first phase of a Pacific cable--a cable from British Columbia to Hawaii.<sup>1</sup> In a long written submission to Macdonald and in a personal visit Fleming stressed that:

The representatives of this powerful organization [Eastern Telegraph and Eastern Extension Telegraph] have left nothing undone to assert its impracticability, to disparage its advantages, and to thwart every effort which has been made to promote its establishment.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the strength of these private interests Fleming advocated a Pacific cable "as a public work without the intervention of a Company . . . under a system of federated ownership. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Political events in Canada once again pushed all other matters including the Pacific cable to the background as attention centered upon the federal election which Macdonald announced on February 2, 1891. The issues largely dealt with Canada's economic relationship with the United States and the British empire. Macdonald appealed strongly for imperial unity--an appeal that roused Fleming to vote for the third time in his life.<sup>4</sup> Macdonald led his party to victory in what was to be his last election.

The turmoil of the election campaign in Canada nearly

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, December 1890; *Ibid.*, Hon. E. Dewdney to Fleming, 10 December 1890.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 March 1891.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 11 March 1891.



obscured a development in the United States which Fleming described to Macdonald as a "narrow escape for the Pacific Cable."<sup>1</sup> Pressure groups in the American Senate followed quickly upon the transition of power in Hawaii following the death of the King to pass an amendment which offered a three million dollar subsidy for a telegraph cable to Hawaii. This amendment did not survive the House of Representatives, but another amendment to pay for soundings of the route passed.<sup>2</sup> Fleming reacted to this information with frenzied activity on behalf of a cable from Vancouver to Hawaii to combat the challenge from San Francisco.

Fleming worked on two levels in the question of a telegraph connection to Hawaii. He used all of the influence he could bring to bear to get the Canadian government to make an offer to construct the cable. This he hoped would bring an offer of assistance from the British government. Canada could include the aid already pledged by the Hawaiian Government for any cable connection to North America.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Fleming contacted Sir Donald Smith and C. Van Horne and was authorized to inform the Canadian government that a

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 11 March 1891.

<sup>2</sup>*New York Tribune*, 17 February 1891; and *New York Herald*, 4 March 1891.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Sir Hector Langevin, 17 March 1891.





private company could be expected to offer to lease the cable if constructed by the government or to construct it if the government would guarantee the interest on the capital.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming was convinced that "we have reached the last moment of action if we are to secure the terminus of the Australian telegraph in Canada."<sup>2</sup>

On this occasion Fleming's efforts were rewarded by uncharacteristically rapid action on the part of the Conservative Cabinet. An Order-in-Council was sent to Tupper in London with instructions to ascertain if the British would add a subsidy for a Canadian cable to Hawaii. Langevin added that the idea received Macdonald's approval. The Order was prepared on the basis of Fleming's information which Langevin drafted into a report. For added emphasis a statistical summary and a map of the various routes with the respective cost of each, prepared by F. N. Gisborne, was also included.<sup>3</sup> Fleming had good reason to be personally satisfied with the action

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 48, no. 331, Fleming to Sir Donald Smith, 25 March 1891; *Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 25 March 1891; *Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin, 28 March 1891; *Ibid.*, vol. 31, no. 216, Fleming to Macdonald, 31 March 1891; *Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin, 31 March 1891; *Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 354, W. C. Van Horne to Fleming, 3 April 1891.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 193, Fleming to Langevin, 7 April 1891.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Langevin to Tupper, 21 April 1891.



taken. He wrote to wish Tupper luck in his meetings with the authorities of the "Home Government."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Tupper, in his capacity as High Commissioner for Canada, kept Fleming informed regarding the reception of the Canadian proposal.<sup>2</sup> By July Tupper held "very little prospect at present of Home Government doing anything."<sup>3</sup> In addition the new Prime Minister, The Honourable Sir John J. C. Abbott informed Tupper in July that regarding the Order-in-Council the Canadian government wanted nothing beyond an expression of opinion from the imperial government. In Abbott's words this would leave the "matter entirely open for us to proceed with or not."<sup>4</sup> The momentum which Fleming had temporarily built up for a cable to Hawaii faded away during the seventeen months while Abbott was Prime Minister. It was the low point in Fleming's quest to create a telegraph link with Australia. Abbott, never in

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<sup>1</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 9, pp. 4355-56, Fleming to Tupper, 5 May 1891. The strain of the election and of age had begun to affect Macdonald seriously in May 1891. A note in the Macdonald file of the Fleming Papers, possibly written to Fleming (the greeting is unclear) says, "The truth is I am seriously unwell; but don't like the Grits to know it as it would raise the value of their stock. I will lunch with you on Monday if I am well enough." The note is signed by Macdonald. Vol. 31, no. 216, 13 May 1891. (John A. Macdonald died on 6 June 1891.)

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, July 1891; and *Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Tupper to Fleming, 23 June 1891.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 21 July 1891.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Abbott to Tupper, 4 July 1891.



good health, had accepted the leadership of the country with great reluctance. His first months in office in 1891 saw the government survive the Public Works scandals which resulted in Langevin, one of Fleming's more influential contacts within the Cabinet, being forced to resign. Abbott contented himself with continuing the general policies of Macdonald. He was not, however, prepared to embark on new or imaginative ventures such as a Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup> Positive steps toward the realization of a Pacific cable would not be made until Sir John Sparrow David Thompson, whose Catholicism had kept him from becoming Prime Minister in 1891, finally accepted the office in December 1892.

During the months of Abbott's leadership, Fleming recognized the improbability of getting the assistance of the Canadian government for a cable project. The time was filled by Fleming with extensive activity including his duties as Chancellor of Queen's University and the presentation of numerous lectures and written articles. Fleming's diverse interests are shown in examples of articles published in this period which included "Fixing of a Standard Time," "Parliamentary v. Party Government," "Ocean Steam Navigation," and "Postage Stamps and Colour Blindness."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lovell C. Clark, "Macdonald's Conservative Successors, 1891-1896," *Character and Circumstance*, ed. Moir, pp. 145-46.

<sup>2</sup>Burpee, *Sandford Fleming*, pp. 279-84 includes a bibliography of his published work.



The Pacific cable project was not, however, completely ignored. Fleming was urged by friends such as George Parkin to continue to publicize the cause. The need for the cable was apparent; Parkin felt it only awaited the proper moment to be carried to success.<sup>1</sup> Fleming, again in London on Hudson's Bay Company business, represented the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce at a London meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the Empire.<sup>2</sup> These meetings resulted in individual delegates pushing the subject of empire communication with their local chambers.<sup>3</sup> This in turn was translated into public pressure in the form of a resolution from the Associated Chambers of Commerce urging the establishment of a Pacific cable and the establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate the entire question of imperial telegraphic communication.<sup>4</sup> Additional public attention was drawn to the question of the Pacific cable with the announcement in November 1892 that the French were planning a cable

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 270, Parkin to Fleming, 3 July 1892. During the spring and summer of 1892 the Canadian Pacific Railway tentatively explored the possibility of obtaining cable landing rights from Japan. A separate company was to be formed if such rights were obtained. The Company never pursued the idea. Sir Mackenzie Bowell Papers, vol. 10, pp. 4945-77, copies of C.O. and F.O. correspondence with Japan (hereinafter cited as Bowell Papers).

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, June 1892.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 50, no. 349, Fleming to Tupper, 5 November 1892.

<sup>4</sup>C.O. 42, 335/19, 20918, Associated Chambers of Commerce to C.O., 25 October 1892.





from Queensland to New Caledonia.<sup>1</sup> Fleming and others concerned about British communication links feared this French cable would eventually be extended to Hawaii, thus ruling out a British Pacific cable.

Abbott's resignation in November 1892 due to ill health brought Sir John Thompson to the leadership of the government. Young, possessing an impressive intellect and grasp of affairs, he brought renewed vitality to the government. The scandals of Macdonald's last years were effectively buried and Thompson pushed forward in numerous areas including the whole question of Canada's position in the Pacific, a paramount aspect of which was the question of communication in the Pacific. It appeared that a Canadian political leader had finally emerged who would initiate constructive action in the area in which Fleming had so long worked.

One of Sir John Thompson's first activities in 1893 was a trip to France which resulted in a Canada-France trade treaty. Prior to his departure Fleming informed Thompson in detail of the status of the movement to establish a British Pacific cable. Fleming stressed the success that had greeted his attempts, with the support of Macdonald and Lansdowne, to have potential cable stations in the Pacific annexed by Britain. This action had been premised upon the assumption

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<sup>1</sup>*The Times* (London), "A Pacific Cable," 18 November 1892.



that Hawaii would remain neutral and thus available as a cable landing site. Recent events led him to believe that United States' influence was becoming paramount in Hawaii; possibly removing the islands as a cable landing site.

Fleming was alarmed:

It is simply indispensable that we should have a mid-station at Hawaii. . . . It is a question in which the interests of Canada and the Empire are one and it is a case in which I venture the opinion that you will serve both, by your wise counsel.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming sent a similar letter to Tupper asking his cooperation in London,<sup>2</sup> to which Tupper replied that he would do all he could in the question after discussing it with Thompson.<sup>3</sup>

Sir John Thompson replied to Fleming from Paris, that ". . . I read with greatest possible interest your letter. . . . I shall not fail to impress on the Colonial Minister the great importance of the subject as you have set it forth."<sup>4</sup> Fleming wasted no time once it was apparent that Thompson favoured his ideas. Sir Mackenzie Bowell, Minister of Trade and Commerce and Acting Prime Minister in Thompson's absence, cabled Thompson in Paris in June to report that Fleming urged sending someone to Australia,

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<sup>1</sup>Privy Council Office, no. 9, vol. 5, Fleming to Thompson, 9 March 1893, (hereinafter cited as: P.C.O.).

<sup>2</sup>P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, Fleming to Tupper, 9 March 1893.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 50, no. 340, Tupper to Fleming, 18 April 1893.

<sup>4</sup>P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, Thompson to Fleming, 3 May 1893.



"Ostensibly on Trade matters and feel way. What think you?"<sup>1</sup> Thompson's reply was concise and to the point, "Yes for trade and cable."<sup>2</sup> Learning of the favourable reaction from Thompson, Fleming wrote within the week, suggesting a small delegation headed by Bowell who had already expressed a willingness to go. Such a delegation could deal with trade and ". . . lay the foundation for the cable."<sup>3</sup> Fleming remained convinced that any cable to be successful in lowering the rates must be a government work and must remain government controlled.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that Thompson and Tupper succeeded in impressing the Colonial Office with Canadian interest in the subject of a cable to Australia is substantiated by a report on the possibility of a cable from Vancouver to Australia prepared by the British Post Office in the spring of 1893. Fleming would not learn of its existence for some months. He would heartily disagree with its conclusions that a British Pacific cable would be impractical without heavy government subsidy. The final word in the statement from J. C. Lamb of the Post Office was that, "It seems unnecessary for Imperial interests to go further into the plan."<sup>5</sup> Officials

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Bowell to Thompson, 10 June 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Thompson to Bowell, 12 June 1893.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Thompson, 19 June 1893.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Bowell, 1 July 1893.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, J. C. Lamb to Sec. C.O., 5 July 1893.



in the Post Office, from whom the Colonial Office obtained its technical advice regarding telegraphs and cables, remained firmly opposed to Fleming's concept of a government-owned Pacific cable. Influence of the powerful Pender telegraph interests in such opinions cannot be proven but must have been a factor.

It had been decided in Canada that a trade mission could not possibly leave for Australia until Thompson's return in late August.<sup>1</sup> Fleming was one of the first people to receive an interview with Thompson upon his return.<sup>2</sup> Despite Fleming's efforts, Bowell reported that within the Council,

I regret that the feeling in favour of the Cable Scheme was not as strong as I should have liked and I can only attribute it to the matter not having been given sufficient consideration.<sup>3</sup>

Fleming's disappointment was intensified when it was decided that only one person should represent Canada and that Bowell was the logical choice.

Fleming considered the situation; he was deeply involved and had an intense desire to combat the Pender influence in Australia which in his eyes was "throwing every obstacle in the way of a telegraph connection with Canada." Fleming made a decision on September 4th:

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 49, no. 340, Thompson to Fleming, 5 July 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, 30 August 1893; P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, Fleming to Thompson, 31 August 1893.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 49, no. 340, Bowell to Fleming, 1 September 1893.





the more I consider the matter the more I am satisfied that you should not go alone. . . . I am so afraid that the opportunity will be lost forever that I am prepared to make great personal sacrifices to assist in averting the evil and as you have expressed a strong desire that I should accompany you I intend to do so.<sup>1</sup>

To Thompson, Fleming reiterated the danger to the cable scheme presented by both the French cable to New Caledonia and by the Pender interest which "is powerfully antagonistic to Canadian interests and always has been." Fleming stated that he had given "perhaps more attention than any other man" to the cable subject and now only desired to use the knowledge he had acquired "in the public interest."

It seems to me that the granting of a subsidy to a line of steamers for ten years itself an important and commendable step, warrants and in a measure leads to a further step the establishment of telegraph communication.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson's reply was everything that Fleming could have hoped for in the way of support. He stressed that Fleming's decision:

gives much pleasure to the Government as we are fully aware that no one can so well represent the case of the Cable as yourself. . . . Had we been able to form a definite policy on this subject, before Mr. Bowell's departure, we would have asked you to accompany him as an official delegate.<sup>3</sup>

Questions of how the cable might be financed appeared to be the major reason for Council's hesitation on the subject.

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<sup>1</sup>P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, Fleming to Bowell, 4 September 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Thompson, 8 September 1893.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 49, no. 340, Thompson to Fleming, 8 September 1893.



Thus Fleming left Ottawa to begin a trip of several months which would take him around the world for the first time. While he undoubtedly would have preferred official status such as he had in 1887, the unofficial support from Bowell and Thompson made the effort appear worthwhile.

It was the first Pacific voyage for Bowell and for Fleming. The party travelled by train to Victoria. They left for Sydney via Honolulu on the *Warrimoo*, one of the steamers on the newly established service between Canada and Australia. The party was scheduled to arrive in Sydney, New South Wales, on October 9th.<sup>1</sup> The Colonial Office had been informed of the Canadian mission to Australia. For background information, since they were about to discuss the cable with Canada, the Colonial Office sent copies of the highly unfavourable Post Office report of July 1893 to the governments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, West Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> It was apparent that the Colonial Office was not interested in further pressure from the Colonial governments regarding improvement of communication facilities by providing a Pacific cable.

Although Bowell and Fleming spent only one day in Honolulu, it was enough time for Fleming to investigate the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 81, Diary, September and October 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 98, no. 19, copy: R. H. Meade, C.O. to Governments of Australia and New Zealand, 15 September 1893.



possibilities for cable landing sites and draft a memorandum on the subject which he persuaded Bowell to return to the Canadian government. Fleming recommended that, since American influence made a cable landing site in the major islands of the Hawaiian group undesirable, Britain should immediately take possession of unclaimed Necker Island. Necker was a small uninhabited rocky island 240 miles westward from the Hawaiian group.<sup>1</sup> Fleming was adamant on the point that "we should have that Island, the only available one as a mid station."<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Cabinet acted promptly on the request from Fleming and Bowell and Governor General Aberdeen sent a recommendation to the Colonial Office requesting annexation of Necker Island for purposes of a Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup>

It was early spring in Australia, making Fleming and Bowell's month long visit extremely pleasant. Bowell spent hectic weeks meeting with officials concerned with trade in five of the Australian governments. Fleming was involved in a similar series of meetings with respective Premiers and

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Memo. Respecting Necker Island, prepared by Sandford Fleming, 23 September 1893. Fleming described the island as being 1000 feet broad and a half to three-quarters of a mile long, barren of all vegetation except grass, and no more than 280 feet in elevation at its highest.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 14 October 1893; Fleming comments in this letter that he has made a strong personal appeal for annexation of Necker to the Admiralty Hydrographer.

<sup>3</sup>C.O., 42, 335/19, 18152, Aberdeen to C.O., 27 October 1893; C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Privy Council Report #2739, 21 October 1893.



Governors, many of whom he had previously encountered either in London in 1887 or since that time in connection with the Imperial Federation League. In addition, since contact with Canadians was a relatively rare occurrence in Australia, Fleming was frequently interviewed in the press and requested to speak at meetings of such groups as the Imperial Federation League, Chambers of Commerce, and Boards of Trade.<sup>1</sup> A good example of the impression Fleming gave through his boundless enthusiasm for the British Empire, closer Canadian-Australian relations and for a Pacific cable can be seen in a letter of introduction which was given to him by F. W. Ward of the *Brisbane Courier*. Ward describes Fleming as an "Empire-builder" with great interest in a Pacific cable. "Mr. Fleming . . . keeps to the high phases of the subject."<sup>2</sup>

Fleming wrote to Tupper that "we have met with unqualified success in our mission to Australia." Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia all expressed interest in sending delegates to Canada to discuss trade and the establishment of a Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> Fleming also had some harsh words for the Colonial Office officials and other government officials who:

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 9 October to 8 November 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 52, no. 360, F. W. Ward to C. Moberly Bell (London, *Times*), 31 October 1893.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Fleming to Tupper, 6 November 1893.





. . . discourage, shall I say obstruct? our efforts to complete the telegraph system of the Empire and continue to give their support to the narrow views long held by the representatives of the Eastern Extension Company. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Fleming remained indignant about the Post Office report, two weeks later when he wrote, from ship board in mid-Indian Ocean:

It looks very much as if those discouraging and antagonistic reports had been looked up and despatched the moment it was known that Canada was sending a delegate to Australia.<sup>2</sup>

During the long voyage between Adelaide and London via the Suez Canal, Fleming charted his next action regarding the cable scheme. He decided upon arrival in London to press for annexation of Necker Island; to attempt to get the long abandoned nautical survey of the cable route reinstated; to obtain accurate estimates on the cost of manufacturing a Pacific cable; and to determine if Britain would be prepared to attend a Canadian conference on the subject.<sup>3</sup> The British Foreign Office, however, arrived at a decision to defer action on annexation of Necker Island, pending the establishment of a more permanent government in Hawaii.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* It is interesting to note that Tupper sent to the Colonial Office Fleming's assessment of the mission to Australia, but removed the remarks critical of the government officials.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 November 1893.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Marquis of Ripon to Earl of Aberdeen, 20 December 1893; a coup by Americans in Hawaii had deposed the Monarchy in 1893.



In London Fleming pursued the major points in his plan, encouraged by his friend George Parkin, who instructed Fleming to be interviewed in London as frequently as possible regarding the cable scheme. "What is said here goes out to the ends of the world and has its influence."<sup>1</sup> George Grant also encouraged him to keep working for the cable in London, but cautioned him that, "Gladstone is opposed to State interference with private Capitalist ventures, no matter how exceptional the case may be."<sup>2</sup> During this same period Tupper received information that Queensland and New South Wales favoured Fleming's ideas and favoured a conference in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Sir John Pender, who controlled the Eastern telegraph companies, recognized Fleming's influence in colonial circles. He offered to meet with Fleming to see if "some satisfactory result might be arrived at."<sup>4</sup> Fleming would not be put off in his quest. He had the influence to move in the highest circles of colonial representatives in London and he vigorously pressed his advantageous position.

In preparation for an interview in early January with Lord Ripon, Fleming carefully prepared a written summation of the situation as he saw it in regard to Necker Island.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 270, Parkin to Fleming, 27 December 1893.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming, 27 December 1893.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, Queensland to Tupper, 1 December 1893.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 273, Pender to Fleming, 5 January 1894.



This fifteen point argument concluded with the contention that:

No British Cable can be laid across the Pacific without the possession of Necker Island, and without Necker Island the Colonies and Canada may be driven to the alternative of landing the telegraph on foreign soil (as in the case of the New Caledonian Cable), thus abandoning the strategical advantages of a Trans-Pacific Telegraph essentially British, and the assurance it would give of strengthening Britannic unity in the outer Empire.<sup>1</sup>

This note was presented personally to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, at a meeting attended by the Agents General of five of the Australasian colonies, Tupper and Fleming. Tupper felt that, "His Lordship seemed much impressed with our representations "and promised to pursue the matter with the Foreign Office."<sup>2</sup> Fleming, who had now been away from Canada for over four months, departed on the same afternoon. Sir Charles Tupper assured Fleming that he would continue to press the Colonial Office on the matter of the island annexation. In this the Canadians were fortunate to have a close working arrangement with R. M. Meade, one of the Under-Secretaries, who worked closely with Tupper to determine "the best means of securing Necker Island."<sup>3</sup>

Not all British departments were willing to cooperate with the Canadians in the cable matter. The Canadian government which sought information on the extent to which the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 69, "Note in reference to Necker Island and the vital importance of securing this island as a MID-PACIFIC TELEGRAPH STATION, by Sandford Fleming, 6 January 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Tupper to Bowell, 16 January 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, R. M. Meade to Tupper, 16 January 1894.



cable route had been surveyed received no cooperation. As Bowell described the situation, "there appears to be, for some unaccountable reason, an unwillingness on the part of the Admiralty to furnish this information or to continue the survey."<sup>1</sup> Fleming summarized the situation regarding cooperation by the "Home Government" in a letter to Tupper in which he stated, "It is useless however, to look any longer to the Home Government to offer a subsidy, or take the initiative in any way."<sup>2</sup> In this expression of sentiment which turned out to be a prophecy of his future action, Fleming added that the time had come when Canada and the colonies must act or the cable would fall into foreign hands. Even though Fleming was prepared to admit that he had been perhaps "a little too frank and outspoken"<sup>3</sup> in some of his comments regarding the Imperial Government, he was growing increasingly impatient at their continued inaction. This impatience would build over the next two months to the point where Fleming would risk acting first and then explaining his actions to the Imperial Government.

Attention in all colonial government circles focused on the conference scheduled to begin in Ottawa on June 21st to discuss trade, cables and steamships. These questions

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 20, no. 70, Bowell to Tupper, 10 February 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 23 February 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 20, no. 69, Fleming to Tupper, 14 January 1894.





were receiving extensive press coverage in the colonies and in Britain. In these articles Fleming was invariably linked closely to the cable scheme. The *Times* in March credited Fleming

with the principal share in the work of forming opinion upon this question. . . . He has . . . been indefatigable in marshalling facts and arguments in support of schemes for bringing Canada and the Australian colonies into closer connexion, . . .<sup>1</sup>

In addition to marshalling facts, Fleming drew nearer to outright action in regard to Necker Island. To Tupper he confided that it was essential that the British flag be raised over it before the conference meets.<sup>2</sup> Fleming's correspondence over the preceding month made references to the need for the colonies "to act independently of the Home Authorities, even if the object in view was of the highest Imperial importance." Instead of imperial authorities "antagonistic" in outlook, "indifferent" to colonial needs, or who "want sympathy" for colonial communication problems while protecting the Eastern Extension Company, what was needed was direct colonial action.

Such a course will awaken England to a due appreciation of Colonial strength and vigour and national spirit, and give the Colonies and Canada the strongest possible claim to Imperial sympathy and assistance in other ways.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Times*, (London), 9 March 1894.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Fleming to Tupper, 30 March 1894.

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 March 1894.



Provincial support for Canadian action on a Pacific cable was expressed in late March in the form of a resolution of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia requesting a Dominion subsidy for the proposed cable.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming was not alone in criticising the inaction of the British government regarding the cable question. Mackenzie Bowell wrote to Tupper in April requesting further inquiry with the colonial authorities. Bowell was not, however, optimistic when he wrote "I can only hope that I may be mistaken in the surmise that Sir John Pender has more influence at the Colonial Office than is in the interest of Canada or our scheme."<sup>2</sup> Further requests for British action in early May finally brought the reply from Tupper that, "Government think it very undesirable in view of disturbed relations Sandwich Islands to take any definite steps at present."<sup>3</sup> Bowell's requests for information were prompted by Fleming, who had formulated a bold scheme to force the British government to take action. Tupper's negative report from Britain set Fleming's scheme in motion.

The details of the plan of action were outlined in an extensive letter to Tupper written by Fleming after his plan was in motion and could not be stopped. Fleming's plan

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 98, no. 19, (copy) E. Dewdney, Lieutenant-Governor to Secretary of State, 6 April 1894.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Bowell to Tupper, 14 April 1894.

<sup>3</sup>P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, (telegraph) Tupper to Bowell, 5 May 1894.



was direct and bold; if the British government was reluctant to annex Necker Island for purposes of the cable then what was needed was for "some private individual to raise the British flag on the island in Her Majesty's name."<sup>1</sup> The idea developed during a series of conversations over the preceding six months with Lieutenant General Alexander George Montgomery-Moore who had served as Administrator from July to September, 1893, prior to the arrival of Lord Aberdeen, and thereafter as the Governor General's Aide. Montgomery-Moore and Fleming had a common interest in fly fishing for Atlantic salmon and in promoting the interests of the British Empire. Fleming explained that,

. . . circumstances appeared to throw the duty of taking immediate action upon myself . . . without counting the cost. I have accordingly . . . and without the official knowledge of any one here arranged to place the British flag in the Queen's name on this island in the Pacific. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Fleming carefully pointed out that his action could not now be stopped. Since the Colonial Office would possibly hear of his action from other sources he suggested that Tupper inform them.

The instrument of Fleming's personal attempt to expand the territory of the British Empire by a few acres was R. E. H. Gardner-Buckner, a retired British Naval Officer living in Toronto. Gardner-Buckner, working for ten dollars

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Fleming to Tupper, 11 May 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



per day plus expenses and guided by very explicit instructions, was to travel to Hawaii from Vancouver and secure a ship to take him to Necker Island. Once there he was to survey the island as a potential cable landing site, land and "Leave behind your evidence of your visit, . . ." and return to Canada by steamer leaving Honolulu on June 2nd.<sup>1</sup> Gardner-Buckner had only one week in Hawaii, between May 24th and June 2nd, to accomplish his task due to the need to make the necessary steamer connections and inform Fleming of the result prior to the opening of the Colonial Conference in Ottawa in late June.

Even while Gardner-Buckner was steaming for Hawaii on the *Warrimoo*, Tupper described the Colonial Office attitude to Necker Island in a letter to his son Charles Hibbert Tupper, Minister of Marine and Fisheries in the Thompson government:

Lords Ripon and Rosebery wished everything I had said about the importance of acquiring Necker Island to be kept *secret* as any publicity would defeat the efforts that were being made to obtain it."<sup>2</sup>

Fleming had no way of knowing that the British had ordered a warship to examine Necker Island and report on it. It had also been agreed that Britain would send a delegate to attend the Ottawa Conference. The delay in receiving information of Fleming's annexation scheme, carefully calculated by

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to R. E. H. Gardner-Buckner, 7 May 1894.

<sup>2</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 10, Tupper to C. H. Tupper, 14 May 1894.





Fleming, meant that it was May 30th before the Colonial Office commented on the plan. Their reaction was highly critical.

The Foreign Office think that as there may be some outside chance of the agent being delayed on the way or at Honolulu it would be very useful if you were to telegraph Mr. Fleming to tell him that his action is most unfortunate and will seriously imperil the ultimate occupation of the island. If by chance the agent has been delayed, he should be stopped if possible, as Her Majesty's Government must disown and repudiate the hoisting of the flag if it has taken place.<sup>1</sup>

Tupper's translation of this official statement was

Rosebury much annoyed at action. Will repudiate. Fears will destroy good prospect obtaining Necker. Prevent action becoming public if possible.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming in reply to the critical attitude of the Colonial Office assured Tupper that every precaution had been taken to keep the matter secret. He also assumed full responsibility "although others privately knew and not one person disapproved of the action to be taken." He hastened to add that no one in Canada "was cognizant of it *officially*" and thus should not be involved in the consequences.<sup>3</sup> The principal reason for taking the extraordinary action was "to advance the public interest" always uppermost in Fleming's mind.<sup>4</sup> In this as in some of Fleming's other activities public interest lagged

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, R. H. Meade C.O. to Tupper, 30 May 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Tupper to C. H. Tupper, telegram, 31 May 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 1 June 1894.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



behind Fleming's interest and required careful "education" to bring it into accord with Fleming's views.

The actual experience of Fleming's agent failed to live up to his expectations or the fears of the Colonial Office. San Francisco newspapers reported in early June that Necker Island had been formally claimed by Hawaii a few hours prior to the visit of the British cruiser, *Champion*, which it was believed intended to claim the island.<sup>1</sup> Fleming initially feared that Gardner-Buckner had "bungled the affair", but received a satisfactory explanation from Hawaii. Upon arrival Gardner-Buckner contacted the acting British vice-consul in the islands and explained the situation. He in turn was briefed on the sensitive nature of the British position and as a result decided to return to Canada without taking any further action in regard to Necker Island.<sup>2</sup> Fleming believed at the time that the annexation by the Hawaiian government was merely a coincidence. Years later in his biography it was suggested that the true story involved ". . . the reputation of a gentleman who was at the time Minister of the Crown. . . ." <sup>3</sup> No proof exists that the acting British consul informed the Hawaiian authorities of Gardner-Buckner's plan but the two events remain suspiciously

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<sup>1</sup>San Francisco, *Daily Chronicle*, 4 June 1894.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Fleming to Tupper, 9 June 1894.

<sup>3</sup>Burpee, *Sandford Fleming*, pp. 184-85.



coincidental.<sup>1</sup>

The failure and complete lack of public notice of Fleming's endeavor to "hoist the flag" was greeted with much relief on the part of the Colonial officials. Public attention in Britain was focused on the Pacific cable issue during the same period as the result of a sharp exchange of letters in the *Times* between Tupper and John Pender. The controversy arose as a result of Pender's claim in a letter to the Colonial Office and later to the Canadian government that the existing telegraphic communication to Australia had been established without "any Government assistance whatsoever in the form of Subsidy, Guarantee or exclusive landing rights."<sup>2</sup> Pender claimed that existing subsidies were intended only to improve the service and lower the rates. If the governments concerned were to financially support a Pacific cable, Pender argued that "a fatal blow would be given to private enterprise" in addition to causing serious financial losses to the Indian Telegraph

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 35, no. 246, Montgomery-Moore to Fleming, 31 October 1902, "I recall with some amusement your efforts in which I tried I fear rather unconstitutionally (when acting as Governor General) to assist you in getting hold of that Island"; T. H. Davis, The Hawaiian representative to the Ottawa Conference, referred to the incident by saying that ". . . although the 'indiscretion' of a Colonial official may have led to the despatch of the Iwalani I think it saved you from a dilemma." Fleming Papers, vol. 12, no. 82, 23 June 1894.

<sup>2</sup>P.C.O., no. 9, vol. 5, Pender to Sir R. Meade C.O., 4 April 1894; Pender to Lord Aberdeen, 14 April 1894.



system and the South Australian telegraph system, both of whom derived revenue by being part of the Eastern Telegraph route to eastern Australia and New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

The views expressed by Pender were so much in error in the opinion of the Canadian Cabinet that a formal response was sent from the Minister of Trade and Commerce to the Colonial Office. This reply stressed that according to Reports and public accounts the Pender companies had received to date £616,250 in government aid. When the value of existing agreements with five years to run were included the total came to \$3,393,000; a far cry from Pender's claim of being "without any governmental assistance whatever."<sup>2</sup> The letter went on to say that, in fact, Canada believed that the Eastern Companies had received in subsidies and guarantees sums exceeding in value the whole value of the existing cables. It was pointed out that:

. . . it is the policy of the Canadian Government to develop by every possible means, trade and commerce on the Pacific, especially with Australia. To this end a line of steamships has already been subsidized to run between Canada and Australia and it is found that efforts in that direction are to a great extent handicapped (1) by the enormous charges for telegraphy now exacted between the ports of departure and (2) by the entire absence of any means of communication, telegraphically with the steamers at intermediate points. A Cable from Canada to Australia with reasonable and moderate charges is, in the opinion of the Minister, essential to the successful development of Commerce on the Pacific.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 273, Department of Trade and Commerce, Canada, to Pender, (copy), 14 May 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*





The matter drew public attention in Britain following a *Times* article reporting a lecture expressing the views of the Canadian government given by Sir Charles Tupper before the London Royal Colonial Institute.<sup>1</sup>

Sir John Pender felt that he could not allow Tupper's statements to "pass unchallenged." Pender's reply, two additional letters, and Tupper's replies appeared in the London *Times*.<sup>2</sup> The frequent exchanges of opinion, in which Tupper successfully managed to put Pender on the defensive by repeatedly criticising Pender's companies for their monopolistic position, put the question before the public on the eve of the Ottawa Colonial Conference. Pender attempted to prove that a Pacific cable would be technically and financially difficult to achieve, but was finally forced to break off the exchanges because "it is clear that our views on the Pacific cable question are so divergent that no practical purpose will be served by continuing the correspondence any longer."<sup>3</sup>

In Ottawa final preparations were made for the impending Colonial Conference--only the second held and the first in Canada. It had been decided that Lord Jersey would

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Charles Tupper, "Canada in Relation to the Unity of the Empire," *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute*, (June, 1894), 513-45.

<sup>2</sup>London, *Times*, 15, 16, 17, 18 May; 1, 9 June 1894; copies in C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Pender to Tupper, 6 June 1894.



represent the British government, but only in the capacity of an observer to "hear and report." He was not to express the views of the British government on any of the subjects discussed.<sup>1</sup> The delegates for Canada were not definitely selected until June 16th, when it was decided in Council that Bowell, Sir Adolphe Caron, Postmaster General, and George E. Foster, Minister of Finance, would represent Canada. Sandford Fleming had made strenuous efforts to be included in the Canadian group of representatives. This resulted in an official appointment to "be associated with the Canadian representatives at the Conference on all matters relating to telegraphic communication."<sup>2</sup> Thompson in addition made it very clear to everyone concerned with the Pacific cable question that "discussion of it must be begun with the distinct understanding that we are absolutely free from any pledge involving liability to Canada at the present moment."<sup>3</sup> Great interest in a Pacific cable but a distinct desire to avoid financial responsibility were the dominant Canadian attitudes in 1894.

The years between 1889 and the 1894 Ottawa Conference witnessed numerous optimistic signs of progress on a

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<sup>1</sup>Bowell Papers, vol. 98, Marquis of Ripon to Aberdeen, 6 June 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Report of the Privy Council, no. 1849, 16 June 1894; Fleming Papers, vol. 49, no. 340, Thompson to Fleming, 18 June 1894.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Thompson to Tupper, 19 June 1894.



Pacific cable, each of which ended in a depressing lack of activity. John A. Macdonald was never able to expand the conception which he had fitfully approved for over ten years. Abbott accomplished nothing. Thompson's apparent interest in the Pacific, which had resulted in the Bowell mission to Australia and the Ottawa Conference, seemed to indicate that rapid progress on the long stalled scheme was at hand. It is true that the financial prospects for a Pacific cable were not good at the moment with Britain and Canada both reluctant to become involved and the Australian colonies heavily involved in existing agreements with the Eastern Extension Company.

Sandford Fleming had become more adept at influencing public opinion, and his activities on behalf of the Pacific cable in these years were singularly responsible for keeping the project alive. His decision to accompany Bowell to Australia provided valuable contacts in this area. Canadian-Australian commerce was growing and promised even greater reward if communication facilities could be improved. The Ottawa Conference offered the first promise of colonial cooperation on the long sought after project.

Fleming's impulsive attempt to force imperial policy by annexing Necker Island in the Pacific fortunately was not widely known and in no way diminished his reputation. It may have led the Canadian and imperial authorities to be more careful to keep him informed of official action to forestall any other such rash actions by the Canadian "Empire Builder."



Certainly the experience in no way diminished Fleming's growing imperial enthusiasm and desire to promote closer imperial relations through the improvement of communication facilities. His appointment by Canada as an expert in telegraphic matters to the Ottawa Conference put him in a position to advise and influence those individuals with whom the fate of the Pacific cable rested. The experience would lead to still further service on behalf of the Canadian, British, and other colonial governments to secure a British telegraph cable in the Pacific.





## CHAPTER VII

### THE ERA OF THE CONFERENCES 1894-1899

The arrival in Ottawa of delegates from all but three of the self-governing colonies within the British Empire to attend a Colonial Conference created great activity in the capital.<sup>1</sup> Canada, which had taken the initiative and issued the invitations to delegates to meet and discuss inter-colonial trade and the best measures of securing direct telegraphic communication between these colonies and Canada, had acted as a result of a mission to Australia undertaken by Mackenzie Bowell and Sandford Fleming the previous September. Great Britain had finally responded to an invitation by sending Lord Jersey to observe the proceedings. The conference was also directly related to the Colonial Conference of 1887 when the same two major questions had been discussed along with a range of other

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<sup>1</sup>Newfoundland was not invited. Western Australia and Natal did not send representatives due to state business. The government of Fiji, which had been invited to send a representative due to its geographical situation in connection with a cable, declined for the same reason.



problems.<sup>1</sup> Over the preceding few years the Irish question had dominated political life in Britain and colonial affairs received far from the amount of attention and importance which many colonial leaders would have preferred.

The Ottawa Conference stands as Canada's first major effort in promoting closer relationships within the Empire. It was natural that the Canadian delegates should be the men concerned with such affairs--Bowell, Minister of Trade and Commerce, also President of the Conference, Sir George Foster, Minister of Finance, and Sir Adolphe Caron, Canada's Postmaster General, who would largely handle the communication questions. Sandford Fleming served as an expert on the cable matter. Fleming in fact was one of only two representatives at the Conference who were not either ministers or members of the legislature of their respective colonies.<sup>2</sup> Fleming had the additional advantages of having

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<sup>1</sup>The 1894 Ottawa Conference was not in a true sense equal to the Conferences of 1887 and 1897 and those which came after. It has been variously described as "a subsidiary Conference", as "hardly a full Colonial Conference", and a "gathering of a highly "specialized nature." See: I. E. Tyler, "Development of the Imperial Conference, 1887-1914", *The Empire-Commonwealth 1870-1919*, Vol. III of the Cambridge History of the British Empire, ed., E. A. Benians *et al.* (Cambridge: 1959), p. 411; Berriedale Keith, *Responsible Government in the Dominions*, Vol. III (London: 1912), p. 1466; Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences*, p. 17. Kendle commenting on the Conference says, "The 1894 meeting was a firm indication, albeit a lonely one, that conferences were an attractive and effective means of sifting colonial feelings and ensuring a measure of cooperation." p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Tyler, "Development of the Imperial Conference", p. 411.



taken part in the 1887 discussions and of having been involved in the Australian mission which had in large measure persuaded the Australians to send delegates to Canada.

The opening of the Conference was delayed one week until June 28 to allow the Australian delegates, delayed in British Columbia by floods, to arrive in Ottawa. Many of the delegates stayed with prominent individuals in Ottawa. Fleming had Simon Fraser, one of the representatives from Victoria, as his guest at Winterholme, his residence in the Sandy Hill section of Ottawa. In addition to the representatives T. H. Davies a representative, of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, had been invited to attend the Conference since it had become apparent that if a Pacific cable were to land in Hawaii, negotiations for a site would be required.<sup>1</sup> The opening ceremony was scheduled for the Senate Chamber.

Lord Aberdeen presided over the opening of the conference which was attended by the colonial representatives, the members of the Canadian government, both Houses of Parliament and a large number of the public.<sup>2</sup> The reception given Lord Aberdeen, Sir John Thompson and Lord Jersey, each of whom addressed the group was enthusiastic. Their speeches were interrupted numerous times by loud cheers and

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<sup>1</sup>Bowell Papers, vol. 13, T. D. Davies to Bowell, 27 June 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 98, F. B. Suttor (New South Wales), "Report on 1894 Ottawa Conference", pp. 9-10.



applause. Aberdeen stressed the value of intercolonial contacts and specifically gave credit to Bowell and Fleming for bringing about the conference.<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Thompson, speaking after Aberdeen, in regard to intercolonial trade and the telegraphs, stressed "that while there is ample field for patriotism and loyalty, methods of business have to be followed."<sup>2</sup> He also stated that as far as Canada was concerned, "The great object of our hope is that as a result of the deliberations of the conference, the ocean which divides the colonies shall become the highway for their people and their products."<sup>3</sup> Lord Jersey spoke last in the opening ceremony. He equated the conference in Ottawa with the London conference held seven years earlier. He noted that,

During that last conference many questions of importance were mooted and discussed, but were not brought to any determination or solution; but during those seven years these questions have not been allowed to sleep by those who have been deeply interested in them.<sup>4</sup>

Jersey cited specifically the work of Tupper in London,

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<sup>1</sup>"Colonial Conference, 1894. Report by the Right Hon. The Earl of Jersey, G.C.M.G., On the Colonial Conference at Ottawa, With the Proceedings of the Conference and Certain Correspondence." C.7553, August 1894, pp. 36-37 (hereinafter cited as Parl. Pap.).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.





Bowell's Australian trip and Sandford Fleming, who "has never hesitated (applause) to press his views with a considerable amount of success."<sup>1</sup> Jersey captured the exuberant spirit of the occasion in his concluding remark, in which he expressed the belief "that the result of this conference will be the strengthening of those bonds of affections and of interest which should always bind each part of the Empire together."<sup>2</sup> The spirit of unbounded colonial enthusiasm was clearly present at the opening of the Ottawa Conference, but as Thompson had cautioned, practical decisions would have to be made--sentiment was not enough.

The following day, Friday June 29th, Bowell was selected as President of the conference. After Bowell had reviewed briefly Canada's involvement in the two questions to be considered, the formal deliberations of the conference began. Since the question of trade was the more important of the two topics the first two days were occupied with this question and ancillary ones such as copyright and the question of intercolonial reciprocity. Discussion of a Pacific cable began on Monday the 2nd and continued through Thursday, during which time a number of motions were put forward and several were adopted. Sandford Fleming read a prepared paper to the conference on Monday which outlined the history of the conception of a Pacific cable and pointed out the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 40.



serious need for its implementation.<sup>1</sup>

From among the half-dozen motions put forth at the conference regarding the Pacific cable those few adopted contained the points upon which the representatives reached a common agreement. It was unanimously adopted:

That, in the opinion of this Conference, immediate steps should be taken to provide telegraphic communication by cable, free from foreign control, between the Dominion of Canada and Australasia. F. B. Suttor, New South Wales.

That the Imperial Government be respectfully requested to undertake at the earliest possible moment, and to prosecute with all possible speed, a thorough survey of the proposed cable route between Canada and Australia; the expense to be borne in equal proportion by Great Britain, Canada and the Australasian Colonies. G. E. Foster, Canada.

That . . . the Home Government be requested to take immediate steps to secure neutral landing ground on some one of the Hawaiian Islands, in order that the cable may remain permanently under British control. Simon Fraser, Victoria.

That the Canadian Government be requested, after the rising of this conference, to make all necessary inquiries and generally to take such steps as may be expedient in order to ascertain the cost of the proposed Pacific cable and promote the establishment of the undertaking in accordance with the views expressed in this Conference. A. J. Thynne, Queensland.<sup>2</sup>

All resolutions adopted were prepared for presentation to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and to the Premiers of all colonies concerned.

There were two key points upon which the assembled

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 84-99.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11. In all cases it was agreed that the words "Australasian Colonies" shall mean the colonies of Australia and the colony of New Zealand.



colonial representatives in Ottawa could not agree in regard to a Pacific cable: ownership and financial responsibility. It had been suggested that the cable be a "joint national and public work" constructed and maintained by Great Britain, Canada and the Australasian colonies on the basis of one-third of the cost borne by each area. A resolution to this effect proposed by A. J. Thynne was withdrawn after heated discussion.<sup>1</sup> This was similar to a resolution previously passed at the March, 1894 Postal and Telegraph Conference held in Wellington, New Zealand. Fleming's, October 1893, memorandum on the subject of joint ownership was cited as the basis for this aspect of the idea.<sup>2</sup> Canada was especially firm in refusing to promise specific financial support for the cable project. The principle of government ownership was not accepted by all delegates but appeared less serious than the question of financing the cable.<sup>3</sup> The technological objections to the cable, a major problem in 1887, were now seen as minimal.

The Ottawa conference dissolved amid a general sense of satisfaction among the representatives. They had adopted an important precedent of "one colony, one vote" which would be applied to future conferences.<sup>4</sup> They had

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 162-68.

<sup>2</sup>Bowell Papers, vol. 98, Suttor, "Report on 1894 Ottawa Conference", p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Parl. Pap., 1894, Vol. IVI, C.7553, pp. 162-68.

<sup>4</sup>Tyler, "Development of the Imperial Conference", p. 412.



adopted resolutions in favour of preferential trade and discussed the possibility of some means to insure continuity in areas that would require future consultation. The representatives had agreed firmly on the need for a Pacific cable and had entrusted the Canadians to determine exactly what the cost would be. Beyond this the conference had no power to proceed. The colonies still were unsure of the opinion of the British government as Lord Jersey had expressed no opinions of a definite nature. He only sought information for the guidance of his government.<sup>1</sup>

Following the nine day conference the colonial representatives were treated to a week of banquets put on by the Boards of Trade of Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City. Fleming accompanied the representatives on the tour of the Canadian cities which culminated in Halifax.<sup>2</sup> In Ottawa advertisement was prepared, in accordance with the conference resolution, requesting cable companies to submit terms and bids to lay a Pacific cable. The companies were requested

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 885/6, no. 100, "Memorandum on the Ottawa Conference 1894", 26 December 1894. This *Confidential* summary of points in connection with the questions discussed was for the use of the British cabinet. The Pacific cable according to Ripon was of more importance to the Australian Colonies than steamship communications, "but it is not yet ripe for decision." "I will merely add that the Conference was, from a general point of view, a decided success . . . ."

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 9 July-1 August 1894.





to respond in one of three forms: to lay a cable owned and operated by the governments; to lay and operate a cable in return for a government subsidy; to lay and operate a cable in return for a guarantee of revenue.<sup>1</sup> The advertisement appeared in the *Times*, the *Canadian Gazette*, the *Electrical Review*, and the *British Australian*, all of London.

In early August, Prime Minister Thompson commended Tupper for "the zeal and energy with which you have followed up our demands to press the necessities of the cable on our fellow colonists and on the British Government."<sup>2</sup> He instructed Tupper, however, to keep in mind the dominant Canadian attitude toward the cable project:

We have never doubted, as far as I know, the necessity for a cable, but we have always held the opinion that . . . the laying of it should not entail any considerable financial burden on Canada.<sup>3</sup>

Sandford Fleming, during early August was engaged in correcting the proofs of the printed cable papers. It occurred to him that the tenders for a Vancouver to Fanning Island cable would likely be less favourable than for a Vancouver to Hawaii cable. Thus, as he explained to Tupper in a letter, it appeared urgent that "some proper person" should at once go to Honolulu to negotiate terms for a landing site in

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<sup>1</sup>Parl. Pap., 1894, Vol. LVI, C.7553, pp. 275-77.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Thompson to Tupper, 4 August 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



Hawaii.<sup>1</sup> Once the cable tenders were made public the Hawaiian government might well be very difficult to negotiate with.

Bowell believed that "Looking at the Conference from all standpoints, I think I may say that it was a success."<sup>2</sup> With this attitude he was very receptive to Fleming's idea of a mission to negotiate with Hawaii. Bowell instructed Tupper to personally press Lord Rosebery and Lord Ripon to send someone to Hawaii. He added:

It would also be advisable to point out the importance of having the Imperial Commissioner accompanied by some Canadian who is thoroughly posted on this subject, and I know of no man so well fitted for this as our friend Sandford Fleming.<sup>3</sup>

This letter was the beginning of a confusing and at times amusing example of problems which occasionally occurred in the Colonial Office's relations with the Dominion due to the cumbersome system of communication.

Fleming had suggested a British commissioner go to Hawaii to negotiate a lease for a cable landing site. Bowell suggested that a Canadian, preferably Fleming, should accompany the commissioner. Tupper energetically pressed the Colonial Office for a decision. Sir Robert Meade, the Permanent Under-Secretary contacted the Foreign Office, received approval and suggested that W. H. Mercer should

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Tupper, 9 August 1894; C.O. 885/6, no. 98, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., Bowell to Tupper, 9 August 1894.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 August 1894; also see C.O. 885/6, no. 98, pp. 5-7.



represent the Colonial Office. Sir Adolphe Caron, who also interviewed Meade on the subject, was informed that Mercer would accompany Fleming.<sup>1</sup> It was not, however, until the 5th of September that the Canadian government received a telegram via Lord Aberdeen stating that the Colonial Office proposed to send Mercer "to assist Canadian agent."<sup>2</sup> Mercer had been selected because he had attended the Ottawa Conference as Lord Jersey's aide and was familiar with all aspects of the question. Fleming was immediately contacted in Halifax. He was requested to come immediately to Ottawa and to act as a Commissioner to Hawaii. The slight confusion which had entered the scene to this point was due to the fact that Tupper had been ill and Lord Ripon absent from London. This meant that Caron worked out the details with Meade.<sup>3</sup>

An Order-in-Council was passed empowering Fleming to negotiate, along with Mercer of the Colonial Office, cable landing rights in Hawaii. Sanford B. Dole, the President of the Hawaiian Republic was informed that the Commissioners were preparing to travel to Hawaii.<sup>4</sup> Fleming waited for Mercer in Ottawa, to begin the journey to Hawaii. This

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., Tupper to Bowell, 25 August 1894; Meade to Caron, 1 September 1894; Caron to Bowell, 1 September 1894.

<sup>2</sup>C.O. 885/6, no. 98, p. 10, Ripon to Aberdeen, 5 September 1894.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 20, no. 70, Tupper to Bowell, 5 September 1894.

<sup>4</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 5, no. 34, Bowell to Fleming, 10 September 1894.



gave the appearance of decisive action justified on the basis of a resolution passed at the Ottawa Conference.

The Canadian government however, actually found itself involved in a situation which had never been intended. Bowell, in a summary of the events surrounding Fleming's appointment, admitted to Tupper that he had suggested that Fleming accompany whomever the Colonial Office sent to Hawaii. However, according to Bowell,

In no way did I intimate that Canada desired to take the initiative in so important a matter. You can, therefore, readily understand my surprise at the turn of events.<sup>1</sup>

Bowell went on to describe the confusion in Ottawa over Caron's involvement in the situation. It had been decided to await further events when word had been received that Mercer was to sail on the 6th of September. It suddenly appeared that through a misunderstanding the Colonial Office had been led to believe that Fleming was being sent to Honolulu by the Canadian government, "though no intimation of that kind had been sent to anyone in England from here, nor, indeed, was it even thought of."<sup>2</sup> To salvage the situation the Canadian government had summoned Fleming and passed an Order-in-Council authorizing him to proceed to Hawaii in company with Mercer. There Fleming was to:

conduct negotiations without compromising Her Majestys' Government or the Government of Canada for obtaining the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Bowell to Tupper, 12 September 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*





exclusive use of an island by a nominee of Her Majesty's Government--Hawaiian rights being respected--for the purposes specified in the resolutions adopted by the Colonial Conference convened at Ottawa on the 28th June 1894.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Canadian government, rather than admit to a complete misunderstanding of the circumstances, became involved in direct negotiations in Hawaii. Sandford Fleming found himself, as a result of a suggestion to Bowell and Tupper, representing Canadian and British interests in the negotiations.

Mercer and Fleming left Ottawa on September 19th for San Francisco where they embarked for Honolulu on the *Australian*. They arrived in Hawaii on October 6th. Mercer enjoyed traveling with Fleming, whom he described as a man with "a most cultivated taste in refreshments: and if there are any ladies about--all I can say is that the rest are not in it."<sup>2</sup> The two Commissioners made immediate contact with the British Consul and with Captain May of H. M. S. *Hyacinth* who had been instructed to remain at their disposal. President Dole was unavailable but negotiations were begun with other members of the Hawaiian government. It soon became apparent that despite an eagerness on the part of the Hawaiian government to attain cable communication with the mainland of North America there were serious obstacles. The major block was the reciprocity treaty which Hawaii had signed with

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Bowell Papers, vol. 13, Mercer to Bowell, 24 October 1894.



the United States. It precluded a lease of the type sought for purposes of the cable.<sup>1</sup> While Mercer continued the negotiations, Fleming sailed on the *Hyacinth* to (Nihoa) Bird Island, suggested by the Hawaiian government as a much more accessible substitute for Necker Island. Fleming found the island to be barren, dry, difficult to approach and of questionable value as a cable landing station.<sup>2</sup> Tentative agreement was obtained to land a British cable in Hawaii, but no specific island was selected.

Fleming reported to Bowell that the mission to Hawaii was successful in establishing a good rapport with the Hawaiian government. Any agreement however would be dependent upon decisions made in Washington. Fleming was impressed with the sincere desire of the Hawaiian government to attain cable connections to North America and hoped that some arrangement might be possible.<sup>3</sup> Although President Cleveland favoured the concession of cable landing rights to Great Britain the decision to modify the existing reciprocity treaty with Hawaii rested with the American Congress.<sup>4</sup> The matter was ultimately decided by the inaction of the

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 81, Diary, 6 October-30 October 1894; C.O. 885/6, no. 98, pp. 35-38, Mercer to Meade, 22 October 1894.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, C.O. 885/6, no. 98, pp. 41-42, A. G. Howes, H.B.M. Commissioner and Consul-General to C.O., 25 October 1894.

<sup>3</sup>Bowell Papers, vol. 13, Fleming to Bowell, 25 October 1894.

<sup>4</sup>(London) *Times*, 10 January 1895.



American Congress. Fleming by April 1895 had dismissed the possibility of a cable landing in Hawaii and worked for the use of Fanning Island, 900 miles further south-west.<sup>1</sup>

The replies to the advertisement requesting estimates for construction of a Pacific cable, when opened in Ottawa by Fleming, justified the estimates regarding cost which he had made as early as 1887. W. H. Mercer of the Colonial Office, who wrote to congratulate Fleming on the accuracy of his estimates, felt that once the existing Australian cable subsidy agreements expired a British Pacific cable would be assured.<sup>2</sup> The replies received by the Canadian government consisted of four negative and four positive proposals. The replies of Sir John Pender of the Eastern Telegraph Company and the Chairman of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company both concentrated on the negative prospects for a successful Pacific cable. These two companies had an interlocking directorship and their attitude was due in large measure to the threat to their financial interests posed by a Pacific cable. Four London-based companies offered to lay the cable along one or more of the suggested routes owned and controlled by government. These were: Siemens Brothers & Company, Fowler-Waring Cable Company, W. T. Henley Telegraph Works, and the India Rubber, Gutta Percha & Telegraph Works Company. Matthew Gray and his brother Robert of the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Fleming to Bowell, 18 April 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, Mercer to Fleming, 12 November 1894.



India Rubber Company were close friends of Fleming and kept him closely informed about developments in the telegraphic industry in London and informed on technical aspects of cable construction and operation. Estimates for the cable, all facilities and guaranteed repair for three years along a route from Vancouver Island with mid-stations at Fanning Island, Fiji, and Norfolk Island, and with branches from Norfolk Island to New Zealand and New South Wales, ranged from £1,517,000 to £2,350,000. The increased total cost of the cable when Fanning Island was used rather than one of the Hawaiian Islands amounted to £200,000.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of the tenders and the proceedings of the Ottawa Conference, Fleming prepared a paper entitled, "The Pacific Cable. Memorandum respecting its Establishment."<sup>2</sup> In this memorandum he asserted: that all question of the practicability of the project had been removed; that the cable need only touch British soil; that further surveys were not needed of the route; and that his estimates of the capital outlay had been reasonable and accurate. Fleming reasserted his earlier published opinions that, "only by the

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<sup>1</sup>For a complete survey of estimates see: C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, "The Pacific Cable. Report on Tenders," by Sandford Fleming, 20 November 1894. Fleming carefully pointed out on several subsequent occasions that the £200,000 increased cost of the cable would have made the acquisition of Necker Island well worthwhile.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 5, no. 34, 1 December 1894. C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Report of the Privy Council, #3598, 11 December 1894.





observance of the principle of state ownership will the greatest public advantage be permanently obtained."<sup>1</sup> He pointed to the advantages of the Intercolonial Railway in Canada as an example of how a project for the public good had been attained by the cooperation of Britain and Canada. In the case of the cable project cooperation between Britain, Canada and the Australasian colonies would produce "the most advantageous consequences." The paper concluded with a discussion of potential revenue based on statistics of cable use and a survey of the possible ways in which the cable could be financed by the colonies concerned. Fleming believed that,

In completing the "Electric Girdle" of the Empire the effect of the Trans-Pacific Cable would be far reaching, and its influence would be incalculable. Not the least valuable consequence of the proposal submitted would be its high moral and political import. The co-operation of Great Britain, Canada and Australasia in establishing this telegraphic connection would present itself to the world as an ideal "co-partnership," unparalleled in history, and it would furnish a striking development of Britannic unity, perhaps foreshadowing still more important developments in coming years.<sup>2</sup>

In this statement can be seen Fleming's conception of Empire and the way in which technology could be used to strengthen the bonds holding it intact.

The next major step in the cable project, in Fleming's opinion, was to establish a commission composed of a single delegate from each colony to meet in London to work out the principle of state ownership. Fleming felt that the details

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.



could wait until this fundamental concept was arranged.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day which Fleming drafted this proposal for his friend Mercer in the Colonial Office, Sir John Thompson died in Buckingham Palace. Thompson, who had energetically supported the cable scheme, was replaced as Prime Minister by Mackenzie Bowell, also a firm advocate of the cable scheme. Sir Charles Tupper would have been a stronger leader, but was unacceptable to Lord Aberdeen. The government of Canada in the midst of a depression had a leader who has since been described by historians as a man "unable to make decisions even upon routine matters of government," and whose "talent for leadership was nonexistent."<sup>2</sup>

Bowell may have been indecisive but Fleming was not. Within two weeks of Thompson's death he had prepared summaries of developments regarding the cable since the 1894 Conference to be sent by the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce to each of the Premiers in the colonies in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> In a covering letter with the documents Fleming suggested a commission to work out the principle of state ownership, a principle which he claimed was

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, Fleming to Mercer, (copy) 12 December 1894.

<sup>2</sup>Clark, "Macdonald's Conservative Successors, 1891-1896", in Moir, *Character and Circumstance*, p. 149; also see Waite, *Arduous Destiny*, pp. 252-53.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Documents to Australasian Premiers, 7 January 1895; Fleming Papers, vol. 23, no. 170, Fleming to W. B. Ives (Min. of Trade and Commerce), 5 January 1895.



favoured by the Premier and Ministers in Canada. However, he also added that the death of Thompson and Bowell's current illness meant that Canada would not be able to consider the matter for a time.<sup>1</sup> Bowell later added his own personal appeal by telegraph to the Premier in Sydney: "absolutely necessary immediate action submarine Cable joint commission."<sup>2</sup>

The note of urgency in the Canadian messages stemmed from a fear that the Eastern Telegraph Company would persuade the Australian colonies to renew the cable subsidy agreements which were due to expire. The Canadian government was in a position to keep better abreast of developments in Australia due to the establishment of the first office of a Commercial Agency for the Government of Canada. The first Agent for Canada was J. S. Larke who operated the information agency in Sydney in 1894. Larke was extremely interested in a Pacific cable and kept Fleming informed of pertinent developments in the Australian press, among the political leaders and in the commercial community. In one of the earliest summaries of the situation, Larke said that there was little enthusiasm for a Pacific cable among the strong Labour faction in Australia. The Labour Party felt it to be merely a scheme to get government funds to aid the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Australasian Premiers, 7 January 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 5, no. 34, Bowell to Premier (Sydney), (telegram copy) 12 February 1895.





Canadians. Despite this, Larke pledged "to push it here to the utmost of my ability."<sup>1</sup>

Among the capitalists of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Canada there certainly was no rush to profit from a Pacific cable. In an effort to insure that the C.P.R. could handle the cross Canada telegraph traffic Fleming sought written assurance from the officials of the company.<sup>2</sup> Fleming received assurances from four of the leading members of the company that the Canadian Pacific Railway Telegraph with its connection with the Commercial Cable Company would be able to handle the additional telegraphic traffic on its existing system. The executive of the company however, unanimously rejected a suggestion by Fleming that the Canadian Pacific Railway itself consider operating a Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> The railwaymen clearly felt the prospects for profit in a Pacific cable were not commensurate with the amount of capital investment required.

Throughout the summer of 1895 the Canadian government, supported by J. G. Ward of New Zealand and the Agent for

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 195, J. S. Larke to Fleming, 15 February 1895; the Larke-Fleming correspondence most of which concerns cables and Empire communication is one of the most extensive in the Fleming papers and spans nearly thirteen years to 1908.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 51, no. 354, Fleming to Van Horne (copy), 1 April 1895 and 4 April 1895.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 55, no. 354, Sir W. Van Horne to Fleming and R. Angus to Fleming, 5 April 1895; *Ibid.*, D. A. Smith to Fleming, and T. Shaughnessy to Fleming, 6 April 1895.





Queensland, continued to periodically press upon the Colonial Office Fleming's idea of a commission in London to work out the best arrangement for government cooperation. Tupper had informed Bowell in April that the British government was unlikely to take definite action without knowing precisely what responsibility the colonies were likely to take in the matter.<sup>1</sup> Fleming also continued his large scale mail campaign to induce the Australian colonies to act in the matter of a joint-commission--all to no avail.<sup>2</sup> In a private letter to J. G. Ward, Postmaster General of New Zealand, Fleming stated,

I can see plainly that one of the chief reasons why we have been unable to accomplish more is the great distance which separates us, the absence of intercourse and the length of time occupied in correspondence.<sup>3</sup>

This was the major problem Fleming sought to alleviate and it strengthened his resolve to continue the struggle.

Although conditions in the colonies appeared to have stopped all progress toward a Pacific cable in the summer of

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Tupper to Bowell, 24 April 1895.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Parmelee (Trade and Commerce) to Tupper, 17 May 1895; Fleming to Australian Premiers, 9 May 1895 (enclosed). Parmelee informed Tupper that Fleming's lengthy letter was not official but had the sanction of the Minister of Trade and Commerce. Tupper was requested to send a copy to the Colonial Office.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 52, no. 360, Fleming to J. G. Ward, 17 June 1895; J. S. Larke, Canada's Commercial Agent in Sydney complained of the same problem in one of his monthly reports. "The monthly postal service to Canada makes correspondence with Canada slow work, and I am thus without important information for forty or fifty days." C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 71, Larke to Tupper, 26 August 1895.



1895, political developments in Britain altered the situation dramatically. Lord Rosebery's Liberal government was forced to resign in June 1895. Lord Salisbury, supported by Liberal Unionists who had broken with the Liberal Party over the Irish question, formed his third administration. Joseph Chamberlain, one of the Liberal Unionists, became Colonial Secretary on June 29, 1895. A July election resulted in a rout of the Liberals and by August, Chamberlain began his work at the Colonial Office.<sup>1</sup> His attitudes toward the position have been admirably summarized by one historian:

Through strident appeals to sentiment and dynamic political leadership, Joseph Chamberlain gave great impetus to British imperialism. The nation's leading exponent of expansion and consolidation also made an immense effort to improve the instruments of imperial power and wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Supporters of a British Pacific cable soon were much encouraged in their efforts when they discovered a Secretary of State for the Colonies with such an attitude.

Sir Charles Tupper may have been the first of the colonial representatives to inform Chamberlain of the importance which the colonies attached to the question of improved communication but he was soon joined by others.<sup>3</sup> By September 1895 the governments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland,

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<sup>1</sup>J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Vol. II: 1885-1895 (London: 1933), pp. 611-44.

<sup>2</sup>Robert V. Kubicek, *The Administration of Imperialism: Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office* (No. 37 in a series published for the Duke University Commonwealth Studies Center, Durham, 1969), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup>Tupper, *Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada*, pp. 218-25.



and New Zealand were prepared to cooperate in urging the need for a Pacific cable with the British government and in calling for a commission to inquire into the project.<sup>1</sup> Much of the success of this initial agreement apparently was due to the work in Australia of Larke of the Canadian Commercial Agency.<sup>2</sup> Sandford Fleming of course was ever active through correspondence to Australia, New Zealand, London, and personally in Ottawa. He maintained a steady pressure on members of the Canadian government to cooperate with the southern colonies in the suggested commission.<sup>3</sup> He also was forced to write to Larke in Sydney to attempt to quell a rumor that Canadians in general and Fleming in particular stood to gain in some way from a Pacific cable. Fleming asserted that it was

to save the public the fortune derived by Company promoters that I have urged the carrying out of the work as a state work. As a matter of fact the Australians need the Pacific Cable ten thousand times more than Canadians and it is amazing that they keep so calm about it fancying that Canadians have an ax to grind.<sup>4</sup>

According to Fleming the only Canadian reason for supporting the project was "pure patriotism."

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 59, no. 342, A. J. Thynne to Fleming, 20 September 1895; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1895.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 195, Larke to Fleming, 29 August 1895.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 27, no. 72, Fleming to Bowell, 11 October, 1895; *Ibid.*, Parmelee to Tupper, 31 October 1895.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Fleming to Larke (copy), 8 November 1895.



Colonial persistence in regard to the communication question was rewarded in November 1895 by an invitation from Chamberlain for the colonial agents in London to cooperate in a joint commission. The reason given by the Colonial Office for the sudden interest in a Pacific cable was the threat to British interests posed by a French cable to New Caledonia and a recent grant by the Hawaiian government to Colonel Spalding to lay a cable to San Francisco. If the French and Spalding interests joined it would mean the end to a British Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup>

Canada was also vitally interested in improving steamship service in the Pacific and instituting such service in the Atlantic. Sir Charles Tupper devoted much attention to both of these questions at the same time as he dealt with the Pacific cable question.

Sandford Fleming's October suggestion that the British government be requested to supply a loan equal to the additional cost of a cable, now forced to touch Fanning Island rather than Necker Island, was rejected by Tupper. He informed Bowell that he had not in fact supplied the Colonial Office with a copy of Fleming's proposal as had been instructed because, "I have, as you know, always resisted Mr. Fleming's proposals to have the bulk of the cost of a Pacific Cable thrown upon the Colonies."<sup>2</sup> Tupper felt that

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<sup>1</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 10, J. Bramston (C.O.) to Tupper, 11 November 1895; Tupper to Bowell, 14 November 1895.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Tupper to Bowell, 15 November 1895.







when the Australasian colonies and Canada agreed to make substantial contributions, Britain would willingly join on a larger scale.

No financial details were discussed at the full meeting between Chamberlain and the colonial Agents. Chamberlain did however agree

to promptly appoint a commission, and suggested that it should consist of six members;--two to be nominated by the Imperial Government, two by Australasia and two by Canada.<sup>1</sup>

He also expressed satisfaction at the result of the tenders for construction of the cable called by Canada and "could not doubt that the returns from such an enterprise would to a very large extent cover the expenditure that would be involved."<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain reacted very firmly to a question regarding compensation for existing cable and telegraph lines when he

immediately replied that it would be as well to state at once that Her Majesty's Government would not listen to the question of compensation from any source whatever.<sup>3</sup>

From these decisions, according to one of his biographers, "Canada and Australasia alike learned that Chamberlain was the energising British statesman of his age."<sup>4</sup>

The press in London was generally favourable to the

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Tupper to Bowell, 19 November 1895.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, (London) *Colonial Enterprise*, 21 November 1895, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Vol. III: 1895-1900, (London: 1934), p. 25.



announced intention to form a joint commission regarding a Pacific cable. *The Electrical Engineer*, a specialized London weekly, called it "The beginning of the end in regard to this proposed cable."<sup>1</sup> This article was especially critical of the opposition toward a Pacific cable posed by the Pender cable companies with a view to retaining an absolute monopoly:

The game of playing men against men in order to retain this monopoly, of getting the ear of the Press, of pitting nation against nation, has been skilfully played.<sup>2</sup>

The article might have added that these methods which had worked in the past were to remain a constant threat to a Pacific cable in the future.

The terms of the joint commission as announced by the Colonial Office in late November appeared to thoroughly cover all aspects of the question. The commission was,

To consider in all its aspects the proposal for laying a telegraphic cable between British North America and the Colonies of Australasia and to report thereon to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Besides the questions of route, cost, revenue, and the other matters which will suggest themselves to the Committee, special consideration should be given to the question whether the cable should be laid by Government or by a Private Company, and to the distribution of the cost or subsidy among the Governments concerned.<sup>3</sup>

Everything appeared optimistic in Australia where A. J. Thynne wrote to Fleming that "there is the tempting possibility of

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<sup>1</sup>(London) *The Electrical Engineer*, 22 November 1895, pp. 590-91.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 72, Bramston (C.O.), to Tupper, 30 November 1895.



having the whole of Australasia - for once - unanimous and speaking with one voice through our delegates on the Commission."<sup>1</sup> It was an intriguing concept for Thynne but it was never to be possible until Australian federation. J. G. Ward, of New Zealand wrote to Fleming at nearly the same time with a more detached--and accurate view of the situation:

We are anxious to have the Pacific Islands connected, . . . I find it, however, most difficult with the diverse interests of the several Australian colonies, to obtain any unanimity of action.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of selecting two delegates for the commission from four colonies would prove to be vexing indeed for earnest proponents of a Pacific cable.

January 1896, was greeted with optimism to supporters of the Pacific cable. During this month in the midst of the first of a series of South African problems, and while the Ashanti expedition was in progress, the Aden-Zanzibar cable was interrupted. This caused delays in communication to Africa and rerouting of messages to Australia. Press articles such as that in the *Times*, "A Lesson Of The Moment," called for improved communication within the British Empire and especially the completion of the Pacific cable "for State and Strategic purposes."<sup>3</sup> Delegates for the projected cable commission were selected after much discussion by the colonies

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 49, no. 342, Thynne to Fleming, 13 December 1895.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 52, no. 360, Ward to Fleming, 17 December 1895.

<sup>3</sup>(London) *Times*, 7 January 1896.



in Australia and New Zealand. The delegates selected from New South Wales and Victoria were not as enthusiastic as those from Queensland and New Zealand might have been but at least it appeared that everything was in readiness for the meeting in London.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada, however, the Conservative ministry, weakened by disagreement over the Manitoba schools and questions within Quebec, faced a severe internal crisis within the first week in January. The Governor General intervened to hold the shattered ministry in office, and the final compromise saw Sir Charles Tupper, in Canada since December, agreeing to assume the leadership of the government at the end of the current session.<sup>2</sup> Bowell was still nominally the leader of the ministry but Tupper resigned as Canadian High Commissioner in London, won a seat in Cape Breton and took over as Conservative leader in the Commons in February. Within a month the Pacific cable commission had become important as a device to ease the transition from Bowell to Tupper.

The Colonial Office was notified that Canada would like to send the Premier but that it would not be possible until around the 25th of April. Chamberlain was pleased

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 January 1896.

<sup>2</sup>Waite, *Arduous Destiny*, pp. 261-64; it is interesting that the Conservative ministry in Britain also faced a crisis during this period--this over the Jameson raid.





with the selection of Bowell and agreed to delay the commission to await the Canadian commissioners.<sup>1</sup> As it turned out Bowell resigned on April 27th with the understanding that he would leave within a short time to act as one of the Canadian commissioners at the Pacific cable commission. It had also been decided that the other members of the Canadian delegation would be Donald Smith, appointed on April 24th, to replace Tupper as High Commissioner in London; and Sandford Fleming who was to act in the same capacity which he had filled in 1894--as technical advisor on cable matters for the delegation. Canada made an effort to persuade Chamberlain to increase the delegation to three from each area so that Fleming might have a full place and so that New Zealand might be represented, but the effort failed.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian commissioners sailed from Canada on May 16th in the company of Lady Smith and Mrs. Tupper, leaving behind the increasingly troubled Canadian political situation. Their arrival in London ten days later came at what Bowell described as a "bad time." Chamberlain was out of town and Bowell informed Tupper that it might take two weeks to six months before the meetings of the Cable Commission

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 72, Tupper to J. G. Colmer, Secretary to Canadian High Commissioner in London, (Acting High Commissioner), 18 March 1896; *Ibid.*, C.O. to Colmer, 23 March 1896.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Order-in-Council #1186J, 25 April 1896; Tupper to Chamberlain, 23 April 1896; C.O. to Colmer, 28 April 1896.



could be held.<sup>1</sup> To the relief of the Canadian Commissioners the Colonial Office arranged the first meeting for June 5th in the office of Lord Selborne, one of the British Commissioners. The Colonial Office did however, further limit the discussions. Financial questions were removed from the agenda until the form of the cable could be decided--if it were approved.<sup>2</sup>

The first meeting of the Committee was entirely unsatisfactory from the Canadian viewpoint. Fleming described the Australians' attitude as "hostile", and Selborne informed the Commissioners that there would be a four to six week adjournment to allow the Australian delegates to attend an international Telegraphic Conference in Budapest.<sup>3</sup> Bowell and Fleming under the circumstances sought instructions regarding returning to Canada but were told by Tupper to remain until the work of the Commission was completed.<sup>4</sup> Bowell was thus absent throughout the turbulent election campaign in Canada in June 1896. The resulting defeat of the Conservatives caused Bowell to once again request

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<sup>1</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 11, Bowell to Tupper, 26 May 1896.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 72, Chamberlain to Smith, 3 June 1896. Those attending in addition to the Canadians were: Earl Selborne, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, G. H. Murray, Department of the Treasury, Sir Saul Samuel, Agent-General for New South Wales and Duncan Gillies, Agent-General for Victoria.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 82, Diary, 5 June 1896.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 72, Smith to Tupper, 5 June 1896; Tupper to Smith, 5 June 1896.



instructions. It was decided that Smith, Bowell and Fleming should await instructions from the new Premier--Wilfrid Laurier.<sup>1</sup> This development was followed immediately by a decision by Chamberlain that the Commission would be postponed until October 26th. The delay in the meetings was due to a Parliamentary recess in Britain, the desire of the Australians to attend the Budapest conference and undoubtedly due to a desire on the part of the Colonial Office to allow the new Canadian Liberal government to consider the Pacific cable question and formulate a policy. For the benefit of the Colonial Office, for Tupper, and for the Laurier government, Fleming and Bowell drafted an extensive resumé of all developments in connection with a Pacific cable to July 1896.<sup>2</sup> Further progress on the idea awaited the opinion of the Laurier government on the question and the October Committee meetings.

Although no exact record of the Committee meeting of June 5 remained, Fleming described it as "an unpleasant discussion" in a letter to Thynne in Queensland. Fleming was convinced that the Australians needed to learn that the Australian delegates caused the meeting to be "a waste of time" and that no progress would ever be made unless they

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<sup>1</sup>Tupper Papers, vol. 11, Bowell to Tupper, 30 June 1896.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 72, Fleming to Smith, 16 July 1896; also see Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, vol. 17, pp. 6395-6417, Fleming to Laurier, 18 August 1896 (hereinafter cited as Laurier Papers).



adopted a more "cordial manner."<sup>1</sup> The problem appeared to be that the Australian delegates attempted to get Fleming removed from the actual discussions since they had been limited to only two representatives. The Canadians refused and the unpleasantness ensued. It was not a good beginning for what Fleming had hoped would be a grand example of inter-colonial cooperation.<sup>2</sup> Fleming and Bowell both returned to Canada in July.

The Laurier ministry had a sound regional basis and a good working majority in the House of Commons. Many other more important questions required the immediate attention of the government and a policy on the Pacific cable was not considered for some time. In early October Bowell resigned his position feeling that Canada should be represented by a man of Laurier's own selection should he desire to continue with the meetings.<sup>3</sup> Laurier decided to continue the meetings and replaced Bowell with A. G. Jones, a Halifax

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 195, Fleming to Thynne, (copy), 10 July 1896 and 16 July 1896.

<sup>2</sup>Sir John Pender the leading opponent of a Pacific cable died in July 1896. The Marquis of Tweeddale became Chairman of the Eastern Telegraph Company.

<sup>3</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 22, p. 7810, Bowell to Laurier, 5 October 1896; Bowell, who resigned to become Conservative leader in the Senate, retained an interest in the subject and continued to correspond with Fleming. Fleming Papers, vol. 5, no. 34, Bowell to Fleming, 28 October 1896.





businessman and former Liberal M.P.<sup>1</sup> Fleming and Smith were requested to continue as Commissioners but a delay in the next meeting was requested until November 9th. The delay was to allow Fleming, who was forced to cancel a speaking engagement in Princeton, New Jersey, to travel to London. The policy of the Laurier government in regard to a Pacific cable was clearly stated in the instructions to the Commissioners. Despite the fact that Chamberlain apparently feared that the Laurier government would not support the scheme, Laurier cabled Smith:

Canadian government favors cable but desires to know extent of liability before final commitment to scheme--principle suggested in Flemings letter of eleventh October last year appears equitable--would like all points of landing in British territory--Wilfrid Laurier<sup>2</sup>

There had once again been a degree of confusion over the number of representatives from each area, and the Canadian government was forced to alter Fleming's status from Commissioner to Technical Advisor.<sup>3</sup>

Even before the meetings resumed the Australians objected again to Fleming's presence due to his published opinions on the subject of a Pacific cable.<sup>4</sup> Fleming quietly agreed that if allowed to give evidence he would remain

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 23, p. 8074, Laurier to A. G. Jones, 16 October 1896.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 73, Laurier to Smith, 6 November 1896.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 197, Laurier to Fleming, 7 November 1896.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 73, Smith to Laurier, 5 November 1896.



absent from the meetings of the cable committee. Lord Selborne saw Fleming privately on behalf of Chamberlain to express regret at the awkward position in which he had been placed.<sup>1</sup> The appeal to his good nature by both Laurier and Selborne appeared to have mollified Fleming; there was no repetition of the harsh opinions condemning the situation which he had written earlier in the summer.

The work of the committee at the Pacific Cable Conference consisted of fifteen days of hearing evidence from witnesses during November and December 1896. The form of the conference consisted of close questioning by Lord Selborne and other members of the committee of all witnesses who gave evidence. In addition, written summations of opinion and relevant correspondence could be submitted to the Conference. Sandford Fleming was the first of twenty-six witnesses.<sup>2</sup> He was questioned for three hours on November 12th, during which time he re-emphasized the need for a Pacific cable owned by

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, W. H. Mercer (C.O.), to Fleming, 10 November 1896.

<sup>2</sup>C.O. 885/6, no. 108, "Pacific Cable Conference", pp. 1-17. Fleming's evidence was the lengthiest heard by the committee. It consisted of seventeen pages of testimony and a twenty-three page printed statement. The introduction of the Report expresses the Committee's obligation to Fleming "whose long labours on the subject of a Pacific cable have thrown much light on the project and materially facilitated the task of the Committee."



the various interested governments. He supported his evidence by referring frequently to the experience gained in Canada in the development of railways, which often were constructed through relatively unknown terrain and which greatly aided commercial development once built.<sup>1</sup>

The witnesses examined ranged from technical experts in telegraphy such as Alexander Siemens, to commercial representatives from firms having extensive business in Australia. Lloyd's sent a representative and J. C. Lamb of the British Post Office, an old opponent of the cable scheme, also appeared. The Marquis of Tweeddale spoke on behalf of the endangered financial interests of the Eastern Telegraph Company and its associated companies. The single point which seemed to be most in doubt was the percentage of existing cable traffic, and consequently revenue, which a Pacific cable could be expected to take from the existing cable companies. Fleming felt that a Pacific cable would certainly get at least one-half, but other witnesses were not as optimistic.<sup>2</sup> Fleming somewhat naively--as it turned out--assumed that if the governments involved owned and operated a Pacific cable they would use it exclusively for their own extensive telegraph business. Under existing international telegraphic practice however, there could be no guarantee that this would happen.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-28.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.



Throughout the closed discussions on the cable Donald Smith and A. G. Jones held to Laurier's instructions not to commit the Canadian government to any specific obligation, while asserting that the cable should be completed in partnership with Britain and Australia.<sup>1</sup> The final personal report of Jones and Smith following the final meeting on January 6th, indicated to the Laurier government that there were no technical objections to a government-owned Pacific cable and that the estimates obtained in 1894 were essentially correct. The division of financial responsibility was not dealt with by the Committee but remained to be taken up by the governments concerned at a later date. The members of the Committee also agreed to keep the proceedings of the Committee secret until they had been introduced into the British Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Neither the Canadian representatives nor Fleming suspected that it would require over two years before the evidence and recommendations of the Committee would become officially public.

Fleming returned to Ottawa and continued from time to time bringing the cable to the attention of Laurier and members

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 30, pp. 9862-66, Smith to Laurier, 19 December 1896.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 73, Smith and Jones to Sir Richard Cartwright, Minister of Trade and Commerce, 12 January 1897; a copy of the "Report of a Committee appointed to consider the Proposal for laying a Telegraph Cable between British North America and the Colonies of Australasia," is in Laurier Papers, vol. 33, pp. 10775-86.





of his cabinet. In Australia in February the first elections were held for representatives to a Federal convention. The Canadian Agent in Australia, Larke, informed Fleming that the Federation scheme would undoubtedly cause a temporary disruption which would delay the implementation of the Commission report on the cable.<sup>1</sup> In Britain, Joseph Chamberlain had turned his thoughts to providing a fitting commemoration of Queen Victoria's sixtieth year of reign. By the end of January, although Salisbury seemed to think there was not enough reason to hold a Colonial Conference, Chamberlain decided to invite the Colonial Premiers to come to England in June for the Queen's festival. As Chamberlain's biographer described the events, Chamberlain informed the House of Commons that the premiers were to come as state guests:

They were requested to bring picked contingents of troops from each colony to march with men from every other part of the Empire in the old Queen's honour. It was an irresistible invitation. They all accepted.<sup>2</sup>

These celebrations, however, meant a further six month delay in any further consideration of a Pacific cable.

W. H. Mercer of the Colonial Office wrote privately to Fleming in March that, "it is curious that one thing after another causes delay."<sup>3</sup> He explained that no further action would be taken until after the June conference of Premiers

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 195, Larke to Fleming, 4 February 1897.

<sup>2</sup>Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. III, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, Mercer to Fleming, 18 March 1897.



when the Colonial Office hoped to ascertain the nature of colonial feeling on the scheme. Fleming in Canada began to initiate action by attempting to have the report of the recent Committee laid before the Canadian parliament.<sup>1</sup> He failed in this effort after a series of attempts. A. G. Jones believed that Chamberlain was not actually interested in the cable and would not do anything until the colonies forced it. "His subsequent action in not bringing down our report confirms this."<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian position on the subject of a Pacific cable remained unchanged from the attitude held at the time by the Committee--approval of the concept without reservation but continued reluctance to state a specific financial commitment without knowing the extent to which Britain would be committed. It was this state of affairs to which Donald Smith referred from London when he wrote to Cartwright suggesting a more definite financial commitment from Canada. If it was not made Smith felt "we shall have no Pacific Cable under British companies for some time to come." Smith felt this to be unfortunate because Canada would derive commercial benefit from the cable,

until the cable is provided, we can never hope to attain that position in regard to the commerce of Australasia

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 195, Fleming to Larke, 29 March 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 176, Jones to Fleming, 1 April 1897.



and China & Japan wh., considering our geographical situation, we are entitled to expect.<sup>1</sup>

As the time of the June celebrations drew nearer, Fleming addressed frequent correspondence to the Canadian government on behalf of the cable scheme. He wanted Laurier to be fully conversant with the subject and he wanted Laurier to see the great importance the telegraph had assumed in Canada and the Empire. Fleming wrote:

In all cases telegraphy as a means of intercourse is being appreciated more and more every day. The extension of its use to many purposes is one of the characteristics of the period on which we are entering.<sup>2</sup>

In all cases Fleming assured Laurier that "a sense of duty" was his only motivation in repeatedly raising the matter. Laurier was sufficiently impressed with the issue and Fleming's sincerity to authorize the printing, at Fleming's suggestion, of a series of documents pertaining to the question. The documents consisted of a summary of developments in connection with the Pacific cable, and were intended for the information of the Premiers attending the conference.<sup>3</sup> Fleming received written assurance from R. J. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand, who visited Ottawa on his way to London, that the cable would be brought to Chamberlain's attention at the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 73, Smith to Cartwright, 10 February 1897.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 197, Fleming to Laurier (copy), 20 May 1897.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 73, Parmelee to Smith, 3 June 1897; also see Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 197, Fleming to Laurier (copy), 2 June 1897.



conference.<sup>1</sup> There remained however, the entrenched forces opposing the Pacific cable in London, described by Fleming in a very frank letter to A. G. Jones:

The Home Govt. is I fear restrained by the powerful influence of the Eastern Ext. Coy which reaches the pockets of both Lords & Commons. Wealthy & influential circles are no doubt directly interested in the enormous profits of the Company & the latter naturally takes every means of defeating a project which, however valuable as an Imperial work would break down their monopoly and reduce their profits.<sup>2</sup>

Fleming could only hope that at the conference Laurier would take a positive stand on the question and force the British government to make a decision on its involvement in the scheme.

The celebrations held in London on June 22nd 1897, to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria were planned on a scale never before experienced in London. The parade consisted of scores of titled nobility, contingents from nearly every military force within the Empire, the Premiers of the colonies, bands and lavish decorations. Fifty thousand men stood shoulder to shoulder along the six mile parade route and held back over one million spectators. Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was truly unforgettable for those who were in any way involved. One of Queen Victoria's duties before she herself travelled along the parade route was to press a

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 46, no. 315, Seddon to Fleming, 17 June 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 24, no. 176, Fleming to Jones, 4 June 1897.





button which sent a brief telegraph message, along the submarine cables which in large measure made the management of such an Empire possible, to her millions of subjects throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> The colonial Premiers, including Wilfrid Laurier, found themselves literally overwhelmed by the celebrations.

A conference of the Premiers held two days after the Jubilee was "surrounded, enhanced, and harassed by the engulfing activities."<sup>2</sup> Joseph Chamberlain had sought "an informal discussion" with the Premiers of the self-governing colonies, but the five sessions which were held were highly formal sessions. According to one historian, "It was in every sense a conference which ensued and not simply the undisciplined 'interchange of views' originally envisaged by the Colonial Secretary."<sup>3</sup> Chamberlain presided over the five sessions of the conference during which the discussion ranged over 17 subjects. In his introductory remarks at the first session Chamberlain touched upon the current status of most of the subjects to be discussed with the Premiers.

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<sup>1</sup>James Morris, *Pax Britannica, The Climax of an Empire* (London: 1968), pp. 1, 31-33.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Schull, *Laurier, The First Canadian* (Toronto: 1966), p. 355.

<sup>3</sup>Kendle, *The Colonial And Imperial Conferences*, p. 26.



The Colonial Secretary informed the assembled Premiers that upon the Pacific cable "we desire to have the opinions of the gentlemen present as to how far they are prepared to go."<sup>1</sup> His remarks on the first day emphasized that Great Britain felt no urgency in the matter and had supported colonial interest in the Pacific cable only as an indication of good will and in a desire to assist improvement of colonial communications. He pointed out the status of the cable project as standing thus:

A representative committee was appointed, which has discussed the whole subject; it has come to the conclusion that such a cable is practicable, has roughly estimated the cost (which is probably less than was originally anticipated), and has also estimated the probable returns.<sup>2</sup>

What remained was to determine exactly how much the colonies were prepared to contribute to the undertaking. Chamberlain encouragingly stated that any colonial proposal in the matter would be given "most favourable consideration."<sup>3</sup>

The Premiers, beginning with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, made general replies to Chamberlain's address touching upon some of the specific issues mentioned by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Laurier spoke only generally on a theme supporting efforts made to strengthen "the bonds which

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 885/6, MISC. No. 111, "Report Of A Conference Between The Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain and the Premiers Of The Self-Governing Colonies Of The Empire," June and July, 1897, *Confidential*, p. 8 (hereinafter cited as C.O. 885/6, No. 111, 1897).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



unite the British Empire."<sup>1</sup> Premier R. Seddon of New Zealand specifically mentioned in his reply to Chamberlain that his government along with New South Wales and Queensland were strongly in favour of a Pacific cable. This was a position re-emphasized several days later when the Pacific cable was brought up for discussion by Chamberlain.

It rapidly became apparent that none of the Premiers at the conference were prepared to specifically commit their government to an exact amount of financial support for a Pacific cable. Laurier took an evasive stand on the idea saying that "Canada is ready to go with the other Colonies." He later added, "We have not taken up the matter practically yet. We are disposed to watch it, but I am not authorized to say anything definite. . . . The subject is somewhat hazy yet."<sup>2</sup> The final position of the Premier's conference on the subject was that Britain would await "a definite application on behalf of the Colonies concerned," indicating that they wanted the project to proceed, "accompanied of course, by a statement of what they are prepared to do."<sup>3</sup>

The inconclusive nature of the discussion at the conference regarding a Pacific cable was in line with the general tone for all of the subjects discussed. No definite arrangements were made on any of the subjects and overall

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.



"the Conference had proved a disappointment to Chamberlain."<sup>1</sup> Laurier at least had the satisfaction that Britain agreed to terminate commercial treaties with Belgium and Germany which interfered with any progress toward imperial preference.<sup>2</sup> The Premiers returned to their respective colonies amid a general feeling of goodwill, but little subsequent attention was given to the results of the conference.<sup>3</sup>

The fate of a British Pacific cable now rested with the colonies. Press reaction to the treatment of the question at the Premier's Conference appeared to indicate that it had little chance of success. The *London Standard* said that the issue had been left in mid air and little would be heard of it in future.<sup>4</sup> The *Montreal Star* blamed the Pender cable monopolies for getting the issue dropped from the Jubilee Conference.<sup>5</sup> The *Vancouver News-Advertiser* printed an interview with Sir George Reid, Premier of New South Wales, who was returning to Australia. He bitterly blamed Canada for allowing the Pacific cable to be dropped because no specific proposal had been made at the conference.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kendle, *The Colonial And Imperial Conferences*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Douglas Skelton, *The Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II: 1896-1919, The Carleton Library No. XXII (Toronto, 1965), p. 33; also see Schull, *Laurier*, pp. 356-59.

<sup>3</sup>Kendle, *The Colonial And Imperial Conferences*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>*London Standard*, 26 July 1897.

<sup>5</sup>*Montreal Star*, 31 July 1897.

<sup>6</sup>(*Vancouver*) *News-Advertiser*, 8 August 1897.





Sandford Fleming received a confidential summary of what had taken place at the conference in regard to a Pacific cable even before the members of the Canadian government. His friend W. H. Mercer in the Colonial Office wrote in early August, "The Jubilee lent itself very well to general ideas, but not to matters of business."<sup>1</sup> Mercer informed Fleming that due to lack of technical advisors, "Mr. Chamberlain found that they were not prepared to discuss the subject."<sup>2</sup> Mercer's advice to Fleming was to influence the Canadian government to urge that negotiations continue on the project and that the Colonial Office publicize the 1896 committee report on the Pacific cable. According to Mercer, Chamberlain could "only move the Treasury with the argument that the colonies are pressing the scheme."<sup>3</sup> Since the Conference "fell flat" on the matter of the cable everything now depended upon the colonies and especially upon Canada.

Sandford Fleming's relationship with the Laurier Ministry was not as close as it had been with the previous Conservative governments and so his approach to the government could not be as direct. Laurier returned to Canada from London in late August, but it was mid October before

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, Mercer to Fleming, 5 August 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



Fleming wrote to him on the subject of the cable to Australia. The letter was intended to explain a detailed paper on the subject which Fleming directed to Laurier through Senator Scott, Secretary of State. Fleming urged Laurier to attempt to do something to combat the attitude, which Fleming claimed existed in Australia, blaming Canada for the failure of the cable scheme. If Canada would only make a definite proposal, Fleming argued, the project would proceed: "I feel too that the proposal is quite in accord with the spirited patriotic policy of your administration."<sup>1</sup>

The source of Fleming's information on Australia was usually J. S. Larke, the Commercial Agent for Canada. Fleming wrote to Larke in early November describing his efforts to have the Laurier government act in the cable matter. Fleming described the Pacific cable project as being at "a critical stage," but under no circumstances was he "going to give up at this point."<sup>2</sup> Fleming also wrote to Mercer, his friend in the Colonial Office, about the situation in Canada. Fleming was not optimistic about the cable, despite his appeal to the government, because Laurier was busy and the matter would be deferred "for some time." Another great problem seen by Fleming was that, "the Ministers are indifferently informed, and the public opinion has not been formed

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 197, Fleming to Laurier (copy), 21 October 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 34, no. 240, Fleming to Mercer, 10 November 1897.



as it would have been, had the proceedings of the Cable Committee been long since published."<sup>1</sup> Fleming inquired if anything could be done to have the Colonial Office grant permission for the publication of the report.

Fleming personally never gave up on a Pacific cable, As 1897 neared its end he saw Laurier and the Postmaster General William Mulock about the cable. Fleming was determined that public attention must be drawn to the idea to force the governments concerned to act and to put pressure on the British government.<sup>2</sup> Fleming used the technique of "an open letter" to Prime Minister Laurier as a means to publicize the critical status of the idea of a Pacific cable. The letter was distributed in printed form and given in expanded form as a public lecture at Kingston in late December 1897. "The object," as Fleming explained in a letter to Premier R. J. Seddon of New Zealand,

is to furnish information & explanation to which the public is entitled with the view of forming public opinion in favour of the Cable so that the Govt. will be justified in taking definite action as soon as possible. All public opinion [in Canada] has been practically suppressed by the holding back of information on the part of the home authorities.<sup>3</sup>

George M. Grant had also been working to influence the Laurier government to take action on the cable question.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 34, no. 240, Fleming to Mercer, 10 November 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 35, no. 253, Fleming to Mulock, 15 December 1897; *Ibid.*, vol. 82, Diary, December 1897.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 46, no. 315, Fleming to Seddon, 3 January 1898.



He reported to Fleming that Richard Cartwright, Minister of Trade and Commerce,

is favorable to the Cable, & admits that the initiative should come from Canada & Australia, especially the latter, as its interests are gravely concerned. But, he thinks that it would not do, in the temper of Ontario regarding last year's expenditure, & in view of the heavy expenditure that will be required for organizing the Klondike territory & for other matters, to propose anything this year.<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce toward the idea was more fully explained by the Deputy Minister, W. G. Parmelee, in a report to Lord Strathcona in London. Canada, according to Parmelee, "has the least interest of all" in the cable scheme. Despite this Canada had done all that was asked in connection with the cable. The problem appeared to Parmelee to rest in Britain and Australia--both dominated by the influence of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company.<sup>2</sup> He urged Lord Strathcona to attempt to correct the impression in the press that Canada was to blame for the lack of progress in the scheme.

Organizations such as the British Empire League, the Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce in various cities throughout Canada and Australia expressed themselves to their governments on the issue of the cable. A representative Canadian example was the resolution sent to Laurier

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming, 10 January 1898.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Parmelee to Smith, 9 February 1898.





by the Vancouver Board of Trade in February 1898. This resolution stressed the strategic and commercial importance of a cable from British Columbia to Australia and added, "The question of the earliest possible completion of a Pacific Cable from British Columbia to Australia is one which demands the careful and urgent attention of the Dominion Government."<sup>1</sup> J. S. Larke frequently reported similar actions taken by Australian commercial organizations.

Fleming attempted to maintain public attention on the subject of the cable through periodic releases of printed memoranda. One such memorandum, released in February, urged Canada to offer to contribute one-fifth of the total cost for a cable to be managed by a government trust.<sup>2</sup> Lord Strathcona, undoubtedly influenced by Fleming, wrote shortly after the release of the memorandum, to Sir Richard Cartwright requesting a definite statement regarding the position of the Canadian government:

Any such action as I have suggested, on the part of Canada, would make it very difficult both for the Imperial Government and for the Australasian Governments to delay a final decision in the matter one way or the other.<sup>3</sup>

Cartwright replied that Canada could take no such action as he suggested until the Colonial Office introduced the report

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 65, p. 20592, Vancouver Board of Trade to Laurier, 11 February 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 104, (printed memorandum) "The Pacific Cable," 19 February 1898.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Smith to Cartwright, 23 February 1898.



of the Pacific Cable Committee to the British Parliament. He requested that Smith ask Chamberlain to take this action.<sup>1</sup> Sandford Fleming addressed a similar request, to at least introduce the reports by the Canadian representatives on the Pacific Cable Committee to the Canadian Parliament, to Richard Dobell, a Cabinet Minister without Portfolio.<sup>2</sup>

Pressure grew in March and April for the release of the report of the Pacific Cable Committee--now nearly two years old. Part of this pressure came from Australia where a Premiers' conference in March passed a resolution offering one-third of the cost for a Pacific cable--the amount to be contributed by New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. New Zealand wholeheartedly favoured the scheme but was not at the conference.<sup>3</sup> Sir Richard Cartwright wrote to London again in April requesting that Chamberlain release the committee report. He informed Strathcona that Parliament was asking for the report. The High Commissioner replied that the Treasury continued to block the release of the report, but that Chamberlain hoped for results.<sup>4</sup>

When no decision appeared forthcoming from Chamberlain, Richard Dobell wrote to Strathcona regarding the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Cartwright to Smith, 4 March 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 13, no. 88, Fleming to Debell, 8 March 1898.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 195, Larke to Fleming, 14 March 1898.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Cartwright to Smith, 21 April 1898; Smith to Cartwright, 26 April 1898.



position of the Laurier government on the issue:

Lately Sir Sandford Fleming has been pressing us to take some action to submit to the Australian Colonies and the Home Government, the views we entertain, and fore-shadow what Canada would probably be prepared to do in the direction of joining the Australian Colonies and the Mother country in carrying out this work. We at once admit that sentiment had a good deal to do with our first taking the initiative in attending the Conference, but, the more we look into it the more attractive does this scheme appear.<sup>1</sup>

Strathcona was requested to have "competent persons" check Fleming's revenue statistics and verify their present accuracy. The publication of the 1896 Pacific Cable Committee report would of course have supported Fleming's statistical summary of the potential revenue for the cable project. Chamberlain replied to one of the numerous Canadian inquiries regarding the report by saying that the British government was currently considering proposals received from the Eastern Telegraph Company for the establishment of a telegraph cable to Australia via the Cape and Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> The Lords of the Treasury felt it inadvisable to release the 1896 report until a decision

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Dobell to Smith, 7 May 1898.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, C.O. to Smith, 19 May 1898.



had been made on the proposed South African cable.<sup>1</sup>

The personal reports of the Canadian representatives on the 1896 Pacific Cable Committee, as well as related correspondence, were tabled in the Canadian House of Commons in late May.<sup>2</sup> This led to a brief period of debate on the subject which summarized the situation: Canada remained interested and would do whatever was requested, but considered the matter of more immediate importance to Britain and Australia.<sup>3</sup> Further action must await the release of the 1896 report by the British government. Joseph Chamberlain was informed that the Canadian government could not reach any decision in the matter until the full 1896 Committee report was made public. Canada placed the blame for any delay in the scheme fully with the British government: "The

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<sup>1</sup>The proposal of "An All-British Cable to Australia Via The Cape Of Good Hope," had been reported in the *London, Times* on 9 November 1897. The article stated that: "This scheme is put forward in the judgement of the companies concerned as being preferable in every way to the Pacific route to Australia." Fleming had written of this scheme: "It is too bad that a rich Company to make ever larger profits and strengthen its monopoly should set itself against the welfare & safety of the Empire." Fleming Papers, vol. 46, no. 315, Fleming to R. J. Seddon, 4 January 1898. Norman Penlington used the issue as an example of the influence which the large cable companies had with the British Treasury. Penlington wrote: "The Treasury had given the impression that the British Government was opposed [to a Pacific cable] although it had made no decision . . . . To correct the impression Chamberlain pressed the publication of the report of the Pacific Cable Committee, though he did not succeed until April 1899." Norman Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism 1896-1899* (Toronto: 1965), pp. 213-15.

<sup>2</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1898, No. 94.

<sup>3</sup>Canada, *Commons Debates*, 1898, pp. 6192-201, 7570-571.





delay therefore in connection with the matter does not rest with the Colonies concerned."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Richard Cartwright appeared to Fleming to be the most logical member of Laurier's cabinet to pressure on the cable issue. Fleming directed numerous letters to the Minister of Trade and Commerce with the intent of convincing him to have Canada definitely offer at least two-ninths of the cost of a cable.<sup>2</sup> Fleming had learned from Seddon that New Zealand would contribute one-ninth, leaving one-third for Great Britain. Cartwright would promise only to confer with the Council on the idea.<sup>3</sup> Fleming's assault on Cartwright was supported by George Grant who had considerable influence among influential Ontario Liberals. Grant, however, apparently was not personally enamoured with Cartwright as his summary of an interview regarding the Pacific cable revealed:

He is quite emphatic on the point (as he is on every point) that Canada will not guarantee more than one-sixth. . . . He went into the subject at great length . . . [and] had studied it & knew all about it.

I am thankful my interview with Sir R. is over. It would take a good deal to induce me to see him on any subject again. Such another "Sir Oracle" is not on earth.<sup>4</sup>

Grant added a few days later that, "I think that Sir Richard means business, *on condition* that Canada guarantee only what

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Smith to Chamberlain, 1 June 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 9, no. 57, Fleming to Cartwright, 14 June 1898 and 27 June 1898.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Cartwright to Fleming, 14 June 1898.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming, 28 June 1898.



he has fixed in his mind to be a fair share."<sup>1</sup> Grant felt that continued publicity would eventually have a beneficial effect: "Popular attention to the subject is what is needed, & what is indispensable in the case of a 'Liberal' Govt."<sup>2</sup>

During the late summer and early fall of 1898 the positions of all concerned with a Pacific cable remained as they had developed in the spring. The British Treasury continued to block publication of the 1896 Committee report; Canada awaited the publication of the report; the Australian colonies renewed their offer of one-third of the cost for a cable while New Zealand was prepared to contribute one-ninth. Fleming continued to correspond frequently with Seddon, Larke, Strathcona, Grant and others about the prospects for a cable--but nothing changed.

As Lord Aberdeen prepared to leave Canada and Laurier concentrated on meetings of the Joint High Commission in Quebec, Sandford Fleming began to develop his own ideas to advance the Pacific cable. Fleming drafted a letter to Joseph Chamberlain on the Empire cable system which he proposed to circulate publicly (in printed form) throughout the Empire. A draft of the lengthy letter was read by George Parkin who believed it to be "better than anything you have yet written on the Cable Questions." Parkin suggested the

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 July 1898.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



*Times* for publication as "that is the class of reader to cultivate."<sup>1</sup> The finished draft of the letter was ready to be sent on November 1st to a wide variety of places including four members of Laurier's cabinet, the Premiers of all of the self-governing colonies, officials in the Colonial Office, the *Times*, the *Globe*, the *Herald* and newspapers in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Sandford Fleming's persuasive paper on the Empire cable service was perhaps the most impressive single statement he ever prepared on the subject. It contained arguments and ideas refined by nearly twenty years of involvement with the question of a Pacific cable. It was his clearest statement in favour of state control of communication facilities throughout the Empire. Fleming boldly proclaimed

No private company, however rich and influential, should be allowed to stand in the way when great Imperial interests are at stake. It must be borne in mind, too, that telegraphy is one of the most astonishing results of science, and that the facilities which it offers, if not shackled by hindrances, may be rendered of greater and greater value to the human race."<sup>3</sup>

The technique used very effectively in the letter was to compare the existing advantages of the penny postage system with the advantages which would accrue if cheap state-owned telegraph cables were provided throughout the British Empire.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 38, no. 270, Parkin to Fleming, October 1898.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 34, no. 244, list of names to whom "Chamberlain Letter" was sent, November 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 90, p. 27577, (printed) "Letter to the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain on the subject of a State-owned System of Electric Cables for the Empire," 28 October 1898.



Fleming emphasized that it was the spirit of discovery, enterprise, invention and achievement which had led to the greatness of the British Empire. Such an Empire separated by broad seas would have been impossible in the past. Now however, "by application of wise principles of government, aided in a wonderful way by the highest resources of modern science" the British Empire has the possibility of being more closely united.<sup>1</sup>

Fleming emphasized that steampower had made the penny postage effective. Electricity applied to submarine telegraph cables "practically annihilates space, and in this one respect has immeasurably the advantage over the ordinary postal service."<sup>2</sup> Fleming summarized that advantages which accompanied the government takeover of the domestic British telegraph in 1868, and predicted equal advantages for the Empire if his projected Imperial Cable service were implemented. Fleming outlined a plan for: a state-owned system of cables from Vancouver to Australia and New Zealand; from Australia to South Africa; from South Africa to Bermuda and the West Indies; and for cables extending to Canada and Britain. A world-girdling system never touching foreign territory and connecting dozens of British fortified ports and garrisoned coaling stations. Fleming was equally

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27578-579.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27579-580.





convinced that:

a State-owned Pacific cable is the key to the situation. . . . I am satisfied that the Pacific cable would prove to be the entering wedge to remove for ever all monopoly in ocean telegraphy, and free the public from excessive charges; that it would be the initial link in a chain of State cables encircling the globe, with branches ramifying wherever the British Empire extends, and that it would be the means of bringing into momentary electric touch every possession of Her Majesty.

Holding the views which I have ventured to submit, I feel that in the public interest I should greatly err if I failed to seek an opportunity of giving expression to them.<sup>1</sup>

George Grant considered Fleming's proposal a "truly statesmanlike document."<sup>2</sup>

An unexpressed fear of American territorial acquisitions in the Pacific as a result of their war with Spain lay behind Fleming's proposal. He informed Laurier privately that the Americans would almost certainly seek to link these islands and Hawaii to San Francisco by telegraph cable. An Australian extension would be a distinct possibility and would end the plan for a British Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27584.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming, 1 November 1898. The effect of such actions as that taken by Fleming is difficult to assess. Norman Penlington describes Fleming's activity as "noisy and exaggerated influence Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism*, p. 215. It would seem apparent however, that publicity of the type generated by Fleming on behalf of a Pacific cable, made the decisions of the political leaders far easier to justify and it was this objective which Fleming sought. "I sincerely hope it may have the effect of pushing on the Pacific Cable." Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 240, Fleming to Mercer, 2 November 1898.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 27, no. 197, Fleming to Laurier (copy), 1 November 1898.



The Laurier government had not, however, allowed the cable question to drop entirely. While Fleming had been preparing his submission for Chamberlain, Lord Strathcona, in London, had been attempting to get a definite commitment of British support from Chamberlain. He reported to Cartwright in late October that under no circumstances would Chamberlain recommend that Britain contribute more than Canada. To settle the matter Chamberlain would recommend one-half of five-ninths of the cost, although Strathcona added, "from what he said it was very evident that he considered he would have difficulty in carrying the Treasury with him."<sup>1</sup> Sir William Mulock, Postmaster General, was sent a copy of Strathcona's conversation with Chamberlain at Laurier's request. In his reply to Laurier, Mulock indicated that he was "pleased that you desire interest in this enterprise to be kept alive." Mulock also feared an American Pacific cable which would not be "favourable to the development of Canadian national spirit nor to Canadian trade."<sup>2</sup>

Sir William Mulock's sudden interest in the Pacific cable gave it a strong support within the Laurier government. Mulock outlined a scheme along the lines suggested by Fleming--a Pacific cable, owned by the governments concerned, managed by a trust and with any profit to be returned to the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Smith to Cartwright, 29 October 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 91, pp. 27970-971, Mulock to Laurier, 10 November 1898.



public in the form of reduced telegraph rates. Mulock indicated that Cartwright appeared reluctant on the idea because he mistrusted the potential revenue--a detail Mulock dismissed as insignificant on a shared basis. Canadian trade would benefit and the cable could also be a desirable political objective. Mulock closed by saying that he hoped Cartwright would act promptly in the matter as it was one of importance.<sup>1</sup> Sir Wilfrid Laurier replied promptly even though he was involved in the sessions of the Joint High Commission at Quebec. He wrote that the matter had been discussed informally in Council and it had been agreed that Mulock should prepare an order and put it through. Laurier added that, "I quite agree with you that we must put it through right away. . . . I conceive the great importance of forestalling the United States on this question."<sup>2</sup> Laurier assured Mulock that Cartwright was the only Cabinet member who doubted the scheme.

Events began to move rapidly once Mulock assumed responsibility for the cable scheme. He wrote again to Laurier, now in Washington with the Joint High Commission, that "I think any considerable delay now may be fatal to the scheme" due to the American threat in the Pacific. "Someone must take the initiative, and my suggestion is that the Canadian Government should prepare the proposed measure, an

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27972-974.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27975, Laurier to Mulock, 14 November 1898.





send copies of it to the Australian and Imperial Governments."<sup>1</sup> Mulock felt this would lead to discussion of a bargain rather than discussion of policy. Laurier replied that: "In the matter of the Pacific Cable, you have done more than anybody else yet to put the subject in practical shape." He instructed Mulock to prepare a measure and send it to Washington, "so that we may be ready to take it up and push it through on our return to Ottawa."<sup>2</sup>

Sandford Fleming was not ignored by Mulock in the cable question. Fleming and Lord Strathcona met with Mulock to discuss the cable scheme on November 26th. Both men also dined that day with Lord Minto, Canada's new Governor General.<sup>3</sup> J. Israel Tarte, Minister of Public Works, wrote to Fleming to compliment him on his scheme for a state-owned cable system for the Empire, an idea which Tarte described as "captivating."<sup>4</sup> Lord Strathcona was instructed to keep Mulock informed about any appearances of Fleming's letter to Chamberlain in the press.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27976-977, Mulock to Laurier, 19 November 1898.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27978, Laurier to Mulock, 24 November 1898. The reason for Mulock's interest in a Pacific cable is not clear. Norman Penlington attributes it to a desire "to strengthen the waning fortunes of the Ontario Liberal party." *Canada and Imperialism*, p. 215.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 82, Diary, 25 and 26 November 1898.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 49, no. 336, Tarte to Fleming, 16 November 1898.





Public notice of the Chamberlain letter was soon forthcoming. Flora Shaw succeeded in having the letter printed in the *Times*. It also subsequently appeared in part in the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Canadian Gazette*.<sup>1</sup> In Canada publication of the letter in the *Globe* led to a pledge of support from George T. Denison who planned to persuade various politicians to do the same.<sup>2</sup> From British Columbia, Fleming received assurances of support from F. Carter-Cotton, Finance Minister for the province and editor of the Vancouver, *News-Advertiser*.<sup>3</sup> Fleming had good reason to be satisfied with the early results of his idea for an Empire cable system beginning with a Pacific cable.

The fact that the upsurge in publicity for the scheme coincided with the first positive action taken by the Laurier government appeared to indicate that at long last the final details of a Pacific cable were nearing completion. Lord Strathcona contacted Joseph Chamberlain on December 22nd to give informal notice that Canada would contribute one-half of five-ninths or five-eighteenhs of the cost of a Pacific cable. Formal notification from Ottawa would follow, but the

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Strathcona to Mulock, 3 December 1898; *Ibid.*, Flora Shaw to J. G. Colmer, 3 December 1898. The articles appeared in the *Times*, 17 December 1898; the *Canadian Gazette*, 15 December 1898; *Outlook*, 17 December 1898; the *Daily Chronicle*, 17 December 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 11, no. 70, Denison to Fleming, 3 December 1898. (Toronto *Globe*, 3 December 1898.)

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 9, no. 57, Carter-Cotton to Fleming, 15 December 1898.



Canadian government desired to know if the British government would support such a proposal.<sup>1</sup>

The action taken by the Secretary of State, Richard Scott, in sending the tentative terms of the Canadian proposal to Strathcona was "a little hasty" according to Laurier. He informed Strathcona that, "There is some misapprehension, amongst my colleagues, as to the amount of expenditure which we will eventually have to bear."<sup>2</sup> Strathcona was again requested to ascertain that the figures contained in the 1896 report were "absolutely correct." This misapprehension within the Cabinet led to a request for Fleming to prepare a printed memorandum on projected revenue and expense for a Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> However, upon his return from Washington Laurier brought the matter before the Council for discussion.<sup>4</sup> George Grant reported to Fleming at the same time that the *Toronto Globe*, a Liberal newspaper, was committed to the cable scheme, and that would make "the party feel that the Govt. is committed to it, & they will look out for arguments on its behalf instead of neglecting the project."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 22 December 1898.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Laurier to Strathcona, 12 January 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, "Memorandum. Cost, Annual Charges and Revenue.--The Pacific Cable," Fleming to Strathcona, 2 February 1899.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Laurier to Strathcona, 28 February 1899.

<sup>5</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming, 9 March 1899.



In April 1899 after nearly three years of waiting the Colonial Office finally authorized the publication of the 1896 Pacific Cable Committee report. The Colonial Office stressed that, "publication of the Report must not be taken to imply any acceptance by her Majesty's Government of the Scheme which forms its subject."<sup>1</sup> Formal notification of the Canadian intention to take action in Parliament to confirm their offer of five-eighths of the cost, which had been delayed in anticipation of the release of the 1896 report, was immediately sent to London. Mulock, who would look after the issue in the House of Commons, wrote that a copy of the Bill would be sent as soon as it was introduced into the House. He suggested that Strathcona

see Mr. Chamberlain at an early date, with a view to his arranging, if he approves of it, for a conference in London at an early date of representatives of the various Governments concerned, for the purpose of completing arrangements for the carrying out of the scheme.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian intention to introduce legislation on a Pacific cable was not approved by Chamberlain who requested the Canadians to defer their action. Chamberlain desired this because the British proposal "may differ from that

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Selborne to C.O., 10 April 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Mulock to Strathcona, 15 April 1899; also see (Toronto) *Globe*, 20 April 1899; Laurier Papers, vol. 108, pp. 32621-629, Mulock to Laurier, 16 April 1899; *Ibid.*, pp. 32727-728, Laurier to Tarte, 18 April 1899; *Ibid.*, vol. 109, p. 32764, Tarte to Laurier, 10 April 1899; *Ibid.*, pp. 32817-821, Lord Minto to Laurier, 21 April 1899.



proposed" in the 1896 Report.<sup>1</sup> The Laurier government suspended action on the subject for the moment, but sought clarification from Strathcona in London. Clarification came a week later in the form of a statement from the Colonial Office offering to cooperate on a Pacific cable "on rather different lines." The underlying assumption on the part of the officials in Britain was that colonial interest in a Pacific cable was "more direct and apparent" than that of Great Britain. Because of this they preferred that full responsibility for construction and operation of the cable "should be borne by the Governments of Canada and Australia." Britain would, however, contribute, "as proof of their cordial desire to co-operate with the Colonial Governments in any undertaking of general concern," an annual subsidy equal to five-eighteenths of any deficit incurred in the operation of the cable--not to exceed £20,000 in any single year.<sup>2</sup> Thus after years of delay and consideration, the Colonial Office had finally offered a proposal fundamentally different from any discussed at the numerous conferences on the subject.

Laurier sought immediate clarification from Strathcona in London and received a "*Very Confidential*" reply

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, pp. 215034-035, Chamberlain to Minto, 21 April 1899; *Ibid.*, Minto to Chamberlain, 22 April 1899; *Ibid.*, vol. 109, pp. 32849-852, Minto to Laurier, 21 April 1899.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, C.O., No. 10745 to Strathcona, 28 April 1899.





within a few days. Strathcona reported that in private conversation Chamberlain indicated that he personally favoured the original proposal. The difficulty appeared to be that the government was not prepared to take part in the management of a Pacific cable and thus become a competitor of the existing Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. Strathcona suggested that if Laurier wished to make "any counter proposal" it should be done "at once."<sup>1</sup> Laurier decided to stand by his original action. By telegraph he informed Strathcona: "Confidential--Not prepared to agree terms of Imperial Government Pacific Cable and Govt. much disappointed by them. Present inclination is to adhere terms of our resolution."<sup>2</sup> A day later Laurier reaffirmed his intention to insist on the terms discussed in 1896:

You are authorized to express publicly that Government and people of Canada are of opinion that any departure from plan laid down by Imperial Committee would seriously jeopardize whole scheme and do not believe that enterprise can be carried out on any other line.<sup>3</sup>

The question of whether the colonies or Britain would first concede thus became a test of will. For British officials to concede would mean antagonizing the private cable interests and embarking upon a large scale experiment in state enterprise. Should Canada and the other concerned colonies

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Laurier, 2 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Laurier to Strathcona, 2 May 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 May 1899.



yield it meant financial and management responsibility on a cooperative basis beyond anything then in existence. More importantly from the colonial viewpoint, if Britain were not directly involved the desired principle of closer imperial connection would be sacrificed.

Strathcona informed Laurier that press and public reaction generally appeared on the side of Canada and against the stand taken by the British government.<sup>1</sup> The impression had been created that Britain was blocking the scheme. George Denison wrote to Fleming at this point saying that he had contacted Laurier to express support. Denison claimed that both political parties in Canada backed the stand taken by Laurier on the cable issue.<sup>2</sup> An examination of British newspaper opinion on the government proposal indicates that the majority appeared to favour the colonial point of view--that the British decision would necessarily postpone the completion of a British Pacific cable if not defeat it entirely. The government's offer was variously described as "one of the paltriest and meanest offers ever made from the home country to the colonies on a matter of general Imperial interest;" as "a snub" to those who had worked for the scheme; as "a mistake"; as an offer which "shames Lord Salisbury's Ministry"; as "shortsighted and bad";

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Laurier, 6 May 1899; Reaction from the Australian colonies had not yet become known.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 13, no. 85, Denison to Fleming, 6 May 1899. Denison spoke to Laurier on behalf of the British Empire League in Canada.



and as being "in the most abject spirit of short-sighted Little Englandism."<sup>1</sup>

Far more serious were the charges that British officials were entirely too considerate of "the monopoly system," and that they were more inclined to consider "vested interests" than Colonial enthusiasm. Sandford Fleming was mentioned in the London, *Times*, as saying in "a dignified letter which reviews the situation . . . . that the proposal of the British Government is of no value for securing the establishment of so important an Imperial work." The *Times* indicated "that the sentiment of Australian authorities differs little from that expressed in Canada as to the damaging effect which the Imperial attitude must have upon the successful execution of the scheme."<sup>2</sup> The question of a British Pacific cable received more concentrated newspaper coverage during May and June of 1899 than during any other previous period. The fact that almost all of the articles favoured the colonial position and criticized the attitude of the Colonial Office put pressure on the British officials to review their position.

Additional newspaper interest in a Pacific cable was generated by a curious announcement on the part of the

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<sup>1</sup>Press opinions expressed came from the: *Chronicle*, 5 May 1899; *The Evening News*, 5 May 1899; *Standard*, 5 May 1899; *Chronicle*, 6 May 1899; *Financial Times*, 6 May 1899; *Financial News*, 6 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Press opinions expressed came from the: *Morning Herald*, 6 May 1899; *Financial News*, 5 May 1899; *Times* (London), 6 May 1899; *Times* (London), 8 May 1899.



government of British Columbia. F. Carter-Cotton, Minister of Finance for British Columbia, on May 5th, 1899, notified Laurier by telegraph that "This Government . . . will assume for the Province one-ninth share of cost of cable on arrangements similar to those with Australian Colonies." The reason given for this very generous offer was that British Columbia "regards the enterprise as of vast importance, and absolutely necessary if Canada is to secure her proper share of Pacific commerce."<sup>1</sup> The Semlin government hoped that the offer would strengthen the Dominion government's position and help to alleviate the difficulties which had arisen to block the scheme. Laurier replied that the offer would be immediately passed on to the Imperial authorities and that Canada would strongly protest any deviation "from the terms laid down by the Imperial Committee."<sup>2</sup>

The pressure upon Chamberlain to alter the terms offered by Britain to aid a Pacific cable mounted on May 9th. Canada, through its High Commissioner, Lord Strathcona,

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<sup>1</sup>*British Columbia, Sessional Papers, 1899, pp.501-02; British Columbia Archives, Minister of Finance Letterbook, 1899, pp. 294-97, 305; Times (London), 8 May 1899.*

<sup>2</sup>*C.S.P., 1899, No. 51b, pp. 1-3; British Columbia Sessional Papers, 1899, pp. 502-03.* Norman Penlington writes that the province was "moved probably more by resentment of the United States expressed through imperial unity than by the prospects of increased trade." Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism*, p. 216. Later political changes in British Columbia altered the government's willingness to contribute to the Pacific cable when financial details were worked out in 1900. There is no indication that the Laurier government seriously considered accepting the provincial offer of financial aid on the project. The Canadian government did however use the offer as an indication of strong regional support for the stand taken on the issue.





joined with the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand and Queensland to present a joint statement to Chamberlain regarding the Pacific cable. This document, drafted by Strathcona, stressed that:

It has always been contemplated that the construction and operation of the cable would be under the joint control of the Mother Country and the Colonies, and that there would be a joint ownership on some conditions to be agreed upon.<sup>1</sup>

The recommendations of the Pacific Cable Committee were re-emphasized and it was pointed out that the British offer of aid differed markedly from anything previously discussed. Perhaps the essential point stressed was that "the dominating principle which has governed Canada and Australasia is that the scheme . . . . cannot fail to promote Imperial unity."<sup>2</sup> This, the statement added, "certainly seems to justify the principle of joint ownership and control, which has formed the key-note of the discussions and negotiations for so many years."<sup>3</sup> The colonies requested an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Colonial Office as they could not proceed on the matter on the basis of the existing offer of support.

Strathcona informed Laurier that:

I am inclined to the belief that the view taken by the Press, generally, without distinction of party, adverse

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 21, no. 74, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 9 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*



to the Government proposals, is likely to have its effect, and you may be sure that nothing will be wanting on my part to induce the Government to take a more favourable view of the matter than they have hitherto done.<sup>1</sup>

Laurier on the same day directed an additional appeal to Chamberlain through Lord Minto, "that the cable should be owned & worked by the governments concerned."<sup>2</sup> The appeal also stressed the "Canadian disappointment" that Britain would not cooperate in the enterprise on the terms worked out at the 1894 Ottawa Conference and by the 1896 Committee. Mulock wrote to Fleming during this period urging him to keep up work on the scheme by impressing the British public: "That is where pressure can be effectively applied."<sup>3</sup>

Public pressure combined with colonial unity on the issue of the cable induced Chamberlain to agree to a meeting with the colonial representatives to further discuss the issue. A meeting was held on May 15th, which was followed by another joint colonial statement emphasizing that the colonial position remained unchanged--they could not accept Britain's terms of aid for a Pacific cable.<sup>4</sup> Strathcona privately informed Laurier that he had had several additional

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 10 May 1899. Communication during this period was carried out by telegraph. A more detailed letter was usually prepared and sent to Canada at the same time.

<sup>2</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, p. 215049, Minto to Chamberlain, 10 May 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 35, no. 253, Mulock to Fleming, 12 May 1899.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 75, Chamberlain to Strathcona, 12 May 1899; *Ibid.*, Laurier to Strathcona, 16 May 1899; *Ibid.*, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 18 May 1899.



private conversations with Chamberlain on the subject and believed that the matter would be satisfactorily arranged.<sup>1</sup>

It seems apparent that Chamberlain used the pressure of public opinion and colonial opinion to put pressure on elements within the British government, particularly Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to alter the British position in regard to a Pacific cable. The Colonial Secretary stressed the fact that more than commercial or strategic interests were involved in the Pacific cable--it involved the idea of unity and cooperation between Britain and the colonies.<sup>2</sup> The result was a decision "to review the whole matter." The Colonial Office informed Strathcona on June 6th that Her Majesty's Government had felt the force of an appeal based upon higher than commercial grounds. The Colonial Secretary requested that the colonies appoint delegates to meet with himself and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to determine the best way in which the credit of the United Kingdom could be used to provide the capital for a British Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup> The long-

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Laurier, 17 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism*, pp. 217-18. Also see *The Morning Post*, 10 May 1899; *Chronicle*, 11 May 1899; *Liverpool Post*, 16 May 1899; *Times* (London), 16 May 1899; *Daily News*, 16 May 1899; *Free Press* (Aberdeen), 16 May 1899; Lord Aberdeen, the former Governor General of Canada and a strong supporter of a British Pacific cable, strongly worked within the British Parliament to have the government reconsider its offer. *Glasgow Mail*, 16 May 1899.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 75, C.O. to Strathcona, 6 June 1899.



sought principle of a state-owned and operated British Pacific cable had finally been assured.

Lord Strathcona lost little time in informing Wilfrid Laurier of the British decision to participate in the cable project. The High Commissioner expressed what each of the colonial officials concerned with the issue must have felt--a sense of general satisfaction that a united colonial opinion on the issue had forced the British government to alter its intention.<sup>1</sup> The new prospect of cooperation between Britain and the colonies in the Pacific cable project was generally popular in the British press and universally so in Canada. The British colonies in Australia and New Zealand also welcomed Britain's reconsideration on the cable project. These colonies and Canada moved quickly to arrange for delegates to discuss the financial details of the project with British officials in July.

The five years between the Ottawa Conference of 1894 and the June, 1899 decision by Britain to assemble a committee to work out the final details of the Pacific cable scheme had been important ones in regard to the relationship between Britain and the self governing colonies of the Empire. In spite of emotional appeals directed to the task in various sections of the Empire, and in spite of the advent of Joseph Chamberlain to the Colonial Office, all

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Laurier, 7 June 1899; *Times* (London), 10 June 1899.





efforts to restructure the political or economic basis of the Empire had failed. In this light the decision to cooperate fully with the colonies in a jointly owned and operated Pacific telegraph cable would emerge as one of the few definite accomplishments of the numerous conferences held. It certainly was one of the very few projects of a cooperative nature in which the Dominion of Canada agreed to offer financial participation.

The numerous conferences would not alone have been enough to bring about an all British Pacific cable. Public opinion was effectively used by proponents of the scheme to influence the outcome. Sandford Fleming, supported by numerous other individuals and organizations, consciously sought to create a public attitude--not merely to influence the governments involved but to create a climate of opinion within which government decision could be more easily justified. The manipulation of public opinion to achieve such goals was not new in the 1890's but the history of the Pacific cable provides a particularly effective example of its use.

The Eastern Telegraph interests were unable to block the organization of a government owned Pacific cable, but had been successful in using their power and influence to delay the project for many years. Influence within Britain was exercised by appealing to the numerous highly placed stockholders' in the associated companies. In Australia the



telegraph interests could more directly apply influence in the form of free cabling privileges, lavish entertainment, and rate manipulation. Their intense opposition to a government owned Pacific cable would not end simply because Britain and the colonies had finally agreed to cooperate. The Eastern Extension Company still could use its established position and experience in the field to compete effectively and make the Pacific cable appear as inefficient as possible. The public using the cables would benefit from rate cutting and superior service but the Pacific cable would not.

Canada had emerged as the strongest and most important spokesman for colonial interests by 1897. The Pacific cable provides one good example of how Canadian strength could be applied to force an alteration in British policy. Canada was motivated by a desire to cooperate with Britain in the enterprise, but more intensely motivated to compete directly with the United States and forestall American developments in Pacific communication. The Pacific cable was a nonpolitical issue popular with imperialist and nonimperialist alike. It was an issue which attracted the support of commercial groups and one which provided strong regional support for a Dominion policy. The project as a part of Fleming's conception of an Empire cable service appealed to the sentiment and imagination of those who sought a goal of a more closely united Empire based upon free association.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ALL-RED LINE

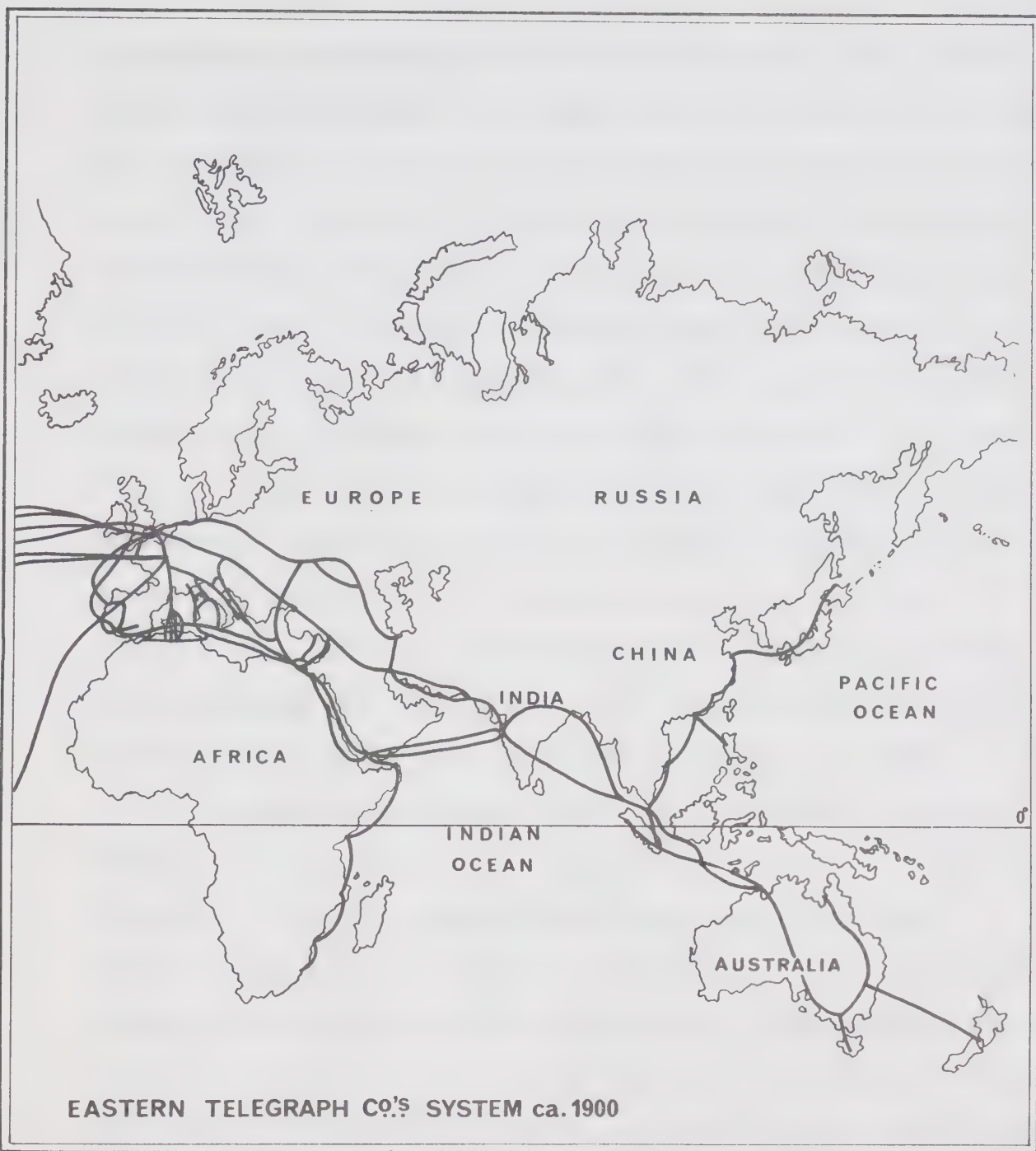
Acceptance of the principle of participation in the ownership and operation of the cable--unique in regard to intercolonial communication--led to the appointment of delegates to meet in London in July 1899, to work out the final terms of the project. Canada appointed Lord Strathcona, who had much to do with organizing colonial opinion to request the British government to alter its stand and J. Israel Tarte, Minister of Public Works. Sandford Fleming was again appointed expert advisor to accompany the Canadian delegates.<sup>1</sup> Britain was to be represented by Chamberlain, Lord Selborne and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, M. Hicks Beach. The Australian colonies and New Zealand were represented by their Agents General.

The conference, held in the room of the First Lord of the Treasury in the House of Commons, produced entirely satisfactory developments from the Canadian viewpoint.

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<sup>1</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 75, Privy Council to Strathcona, 20 June 1899.









Chamberlain proposed that further direction of the scheme should be constituted in a Committee consisting of eight members located in London. Britain agreed to take full responsibility for raising the capital for a cable to be built on the basis of the recommendations in the 1896 Pacific Cable Committee report. It was anticipated that inflation had raised slightly the price of gutta percha and copper and that the total estimate might require an upward revision. Chamberlain insisted that all points touched by the cable as well as Canadian land lines and the Atlantic cables must be British.<sup>1</sup> The colonial representatives agreed fully to these terms. However, delegates could not agree on rates to be charged for use of the cable so this matter was left to the attention of the permanent committee or board.

Details of the British proposal were sent to the colonial governments to the general satisfaction of the Premiers. The only problem developed over the number of delegates to be accorded to Australia. After some exchange of opinion the Australians were granted three members on the committee instead of the two offered by Chamberlain. Canada had moved quickly in the matter and gave notice that Strathcona and Lord Aberdeen the former Governor General, would be considered as the Canadian members for the committee when

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<sup>1</sup>Arrangements to exclude telegraph lines through Maine were specifically cited. C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 75, Strathcona to Laurier, 5 July 1899; *Ibid.*, C.O. to Strathcona, 15 July 1899.



established.<sup>1</sup> Canadians supporting the scheme were pleased at the abrupt turn of events and the apparent progress on the scheme. George Grant wrote to Fleming: "It will be a triumph for Canada, too, & another proof of her influence in the Empire."<sup>2</sup> It was also satisfying to those members of the government such as William Mulock who feared United States expansion in the Pacific. He wrote to Fleming in London informing him about the progress of the Canadian resolution in Parliament, and urging that the work be pushed as rapidly as possible, because, "One break and the whole structure will tumble."<sup>3</sup>

The Eastern and Eastern Extension Telegraph Companies, feeling that they were in a position to be injured financially by a government-owned Pacific cable, requested and were granted an opportunity to present their point of view to Imperial authorities. Chamberlain, Hicks Beach and several others held an interview with the Marquis of Tweeddale (Chairman of the two companies) and other members of the company executive. Tweeddale feared that the Pacific cable would only be the first in a system of state-owned cables for the Empire. He obviously had been somewhat alarmed by

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, Laurier to Strathcona, 6 July 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 18, no. 132, Grant to Fleming; (London) *Times*, 10 July 1899, 9 July 1899.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 35, no. 253, Mulock to Fleming, 26 July 1899.



Sandford Fleming's proposal for such a system and the resulting public interest in the idea. The position of the companies was that "the policy of State interference with private enterprise was objectionable in principle, and not justifiable or needed in the present case."<sup>1</sup> However, if the British government felt such action was necessary, they should be prepared to concede "fair and reasonable compensation" for resulting private property losses. Tweeddale also mentioned an earlier offer to construct, with state aid, an alternate cable from South Africa to Australia or to lower the rates if necessary.<sup>2</sup>

Chancellor of the Exchequer Hicks Beach gave little consideration to Tweeddale's request for compensation--citing the vast sums already paid to the companies by Britain and colonial governments in the past. He also denied that Britain had established a precedent that would soon be followed all over the world. Chamberlain added that the all-British Pacific cable was in fact an exception and that it was not principle which had moved the authorities concerned

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<sup>1</sup>This interview was widely reported by the press and the Eastern Companies distributed a printed transcript of the proceedings. Fleming Papers, vol. 104, "The All British Pacific Cable", July 1899, p. 8; Also see the (London) *Times* 30 June 1899, and *The British Australasian*, 6 July 1899.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* The British government's position was clearly and effectively summarized in a letter from Lord Selborne to Tweeddale on 10 July 1899. A copy of this letter as well as all relevant correspondence to and from New Zealand to May, 1900, is in, New Zealand, Sessional Papers, F.-8, 1900, No. 1-178, (hereinafter cited as N.Z.S.P.).



but a consideration, perhaps partly sentimental, but certainly important that the British Empire needed a system of all-British communication.<sup>1</sup> For strategic reasons a cable from the Cape to Australia would be preferred, but the Indian and Australian governments declined to support such a move which would have little effect on lowering cable rates. Unable to sway the Treasury or the Colonial Office any longer on the question, the Eastern Extension Company still had the ability to work against the scheme in Australia where they were reported as having great control over the press through control of rates and favours granted to leading public men.<sup>2</sup>

In Canada a "Pacific Cable Bill" passed through both the House and Senate with the support of both political parties. Mulock and Tarte, who spoke on behalf of the Bill for the government, stressed not only the commercial advantages and the potential for closer Imperial ties but also mentioned the cable as being the beginning of an Empire system of state owned all-British cables. Sandford Fleming, whose statistics regarding the potential revenue for the cable were introduced to support that scheme, had obviously captured the imagination of members of the Laurier government with his

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Fleming Papers, vol. 27, no. 195, Larke to Parmelee, 17 July 1899; *Ibid.*, Larke to Fleming, 18 July 1899.





scheme for an expanded cable system.<sup>1</sup> Mulock wrote to Fleming, in London as expert advisor on the cable scheme, that it was hoped that the prompt Canadian legislative action on the subject would stimulate other colonial legislatures to do the same. Fleming had begun to worry about the time involved in getting each of the colonies to appoint permanent delegates and pass enabling legislation. Mulock sympathized with Fleming's anxiety "on behalf of a scheme of which you have been the life and soul for so many years," but reassured him that, "slowness by no means indicates hostility to the movement but rather the deliberateness of those engaged in the public service in England when dealing with matters that are not all plain sailing."<sup>2</sup>

Lord Strathcona was also worried about the time taken by the Australian colonies. He informed Chamberlain that there was still a danger of the United States being first with a cable in the Pacific: "There is no safety in the matter until it becomes one of contract."<sup>3</sup> The Canadians were very concerned that the lack of activity would result in a drop in public interest in the matter and possibly open some way for the project to be delayed again.<sup>4</sup> One by one,

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<sup>1</sup>Canada, Commons Debates, 1899, pp. 8567-605, 1789-1100; (London) *Times*, 26 July 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 35, no. 253, Mulock to Fleming, 4 May 1899.

<sup>3</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 75, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 9 August 1899.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Mulock to Strathcona, 14 August 1899.



however, as summer turned to fall in London, the Australian colonies and New Zealand appointed permanent members to a cable board and passed resolutions allowing their governments to cooperate in the cable scheme.

The Laurier government after some consideration had selected Lord Strathcona and John Campbell, Earl of Aberdeen and the former Governor General, as its two members on the board. Sandford Fleming, whom many in Canada thought would have been considered on the basis of his years of work on behalf of the scheme, was quite disappointed. He approved of the choices, but his pride made congratulation difficult.<sup>1</sup> Fleming continued to work strenuously on behalf of the scheme which the committee met to consider again in December, 1899. The committee was charged by Chamberlain, whose place had been taken in the project by Lord Selborne, with determining the cost of the cable and its subsequent operation; with determining the rates to be charged for use of the cable; with insuring that it would, be in fact an all-British cable in route; and with setting up the basis for a permanent administration.<sup>2</sup> The colonies and Britain would still have to grant final approval of the arrangements before the contracts could be signed.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 1, no. 2, Fleming to Aberdeen, 11 October 1899; *Ibid.*, vol. 48, no. 331, Fleming to Strathcona, 11 October 1899.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 76, Chamberlain to Strathcona, 25 November 1899; *Ibid.*, C.O. to Strathcona, 9 December 1899.



The representatives of the colonies met for the first time under the designation of the Pacific Cable Board. Nothing of importance was enacted by the Board before it adjourned for the Christmas season but the colony of Victoria introduced for the information of the members proposals made by the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. These proposals, to construct a cable from the Cape to Adelaide and to reduce the rate per word from 4/9 to 4/- in return for certain concessions, would cause great misunderstanding among the colonies involved with the Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup>

The concessions asked by the Eastern Extension Company were uncomplicated but implied great trouble for a government Pacific cable. The company sought permission to open its own offices for transmission of cablegrams in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Western and Southern Australia having no part in the Pacific cable scheme accepted the terms without reservation. Victoria and Queensland with New South Wales opposed the concessions but New South Wales was uncertain. Turner of Victoria stated clearly that he felt the proposal was intended to prevent or delay the construction of a Pacific cable by sowing dissension among the colonies and lessening the financial prospects for

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, George Turner, Premier (Victoria) to Strathcona, 19 December 1899.





a government owned Pacific cable.<sup>1</sup> Strathcona agreed with this assessment and urged Laurier to affirm that the colonies should give no hint of considering to accept the proposals.<sup>2</sup> The Eastern Telegraph Companies had demonstrated that they remained able of placing obstacles in the path of those working for a government owned Pacific cable.<sup>3</sup>

The Colonial Office took the position that the Eastern proposals were questions to be decided by the Colonial governments.<sup>4</sup> Laurier on advice from Mulock informed

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<sup>1</sup>In 1899 the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company acquired its business through the colonial post office system. This insured at least some control by the colonies. Eastern assumed this right might be lost upon completion of a Pacific cable owned in part by the colonies. They sought to establish their own system to get the public used to their offices, which possibly could offer volume discounts, credit accounts and twenty-four hour service. These were all aspects of a business in which a government department would have difficulty competing.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 76, Strathcona to Laurier, 22 December 1899.

<sup>3</sup>The eastern Telegraph Companies consisted of twenty-seven different companies of which the Eastern Telegraph Company and the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company were the two largest. The directorates were made up of practically one set of men and the different companies each held large blocks of stock in other cable companies. The telegraph business of the Empire was privately owned, but it certainly was not competitive. For a recent overview of Imperial cable communications with an emphasis upon strategy see, P. M. Kennedy, "Imperial cable communications and strategy, 1870-1914," *English Historical Review*, LXXXVI (October, 1971) pp. 728-52. Kennedy points out that to 1900 the imperial, colonial and Indian governments had paid out £2,912,924 in cable subsidies. This explains largely why the Eastern Telegraph Company's real dividend never fell below 6.75 per cent in the years 1873-1901.

<sup>4</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 86, C.O. to Agent-General, Victoria (copy), 8 January 1900.





the Australian governments that Canada believed that the Eastern Extension proposals were calculated to harm a Pacific cable and should not be entertained.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1900 following a conference of premiers in Sydney, Victoria and New South Wales tentatively decided to accept the Eastern Extension proposals in order to achieve lower cable rates. The two colonies, insisted, however, that Eastern would not be allowed to open offices in the colonies until the completion of the Pacific cable.<sup>2</sup> The governments of these two colonies felt that they were not harming the Pacific project by accepting the terms. New Zealand and Canada held a contrary opinion of the action.<sup>3</sup> The promise of a Pacific cable had resulted in immediate financial gains which the Australian colonies found difficult to resist.

The matter of the proposed concessions to the Eastern Extension Company were brought before the Pacific Cable Board in February. After considerable discussion a unanimous resolution was passed and forwarded to Chamberlain urging that no concessions be permitted in Australia until the

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 137, pp. 40891-912, Mulock to Laurier, 8 January 1900; *Ibid.*, vol. 146, p. 43396, Laurier to Premier, Victoria, 8 January 1900; *Ibid.*, vol. 751, pp. 215147 and 215158, Laurier to Strathcona.

<sup>2</sup>(London) *Times*, 17 February 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, p. 215192, Seddon to Laurier, 13 February 1900; (London) *Times*, 19 February 1900; Canada Post Office Department, 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Strathcona to Chamberlain, 20 February and 22 February 1900 (hereinafter cited as P.O.).



financial implications for the Pacific cable could be examined. Chamberlain in this instance concurred and requested New South Wales and the other colonies to defer action on the agreement.<sup>1</sup> The reply from New South Wales and Victoria was that they had every intention of honouring involvement with a Pacific cable. However, they believed it to be at least three years away while the present agreements with the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company were due to end on 30 April. Unless a new agreement were reached on rates the company would be free to raise rates if it chose as it had several years before to New Zealand.<sup>2</sup>

Canada continued throughout February and March to protest in a most forceful manner that any concessions to the Eastern Extension Company, even those which were not to take effect until the completion of a Pacific cable, were a violation of the spirit of cooperation in which the governments had embarked upon the enterprise. "Widespread disappointment throughout Canada," Laurier informed Chamberlain, would be the result if the concessions were permitted.<sup>3</sup> Laurier's

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<sup>1</sup>P.O., 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Chamberlain to Governor, New South Wales (copy), 24 February and 3 March 1900.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Governor, New South Wales to Chamberlain (copy), 3 March 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, pp. 215201-221, Laurier to Strathcona, 21 February 1900. There was almost daily correspondence on the issue during this period between Laurier and Strathcona.



position on the issue was supported by Governor General Minto who wrote: "The behavior of the Australian colonies is most annoying, and to me seems something like a breech of good faith."<sup>1</sup> In Australia some saw Laurier as "the back-bone of the Opposition in fighting the Eastern Extension."<sup>2</sup> The protests had an effect. Chamberlain, in late March, requested New South Wales to delay formal acceptance of the proposals. Laurier than urged Strathcona to speed the work of preparing the tenders on the cable in order that the work could be put under contract before anything occurred to delay it further.<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian High Commissioner was soon able to report that the committee had completed its initial report. Technical recommendations were made by Clarke, Forde and Taylor, a firm of cable engineers employed as consultants on the project.<sup>4</sup> It appeared that the Australian colonies, involved in the final phases of a Commonwealth Bill to set up a federation, had temporarily agreed that no additional concessions should be made to the Eastern Extension Company.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 144, p. 42911, Minto to Laurier, 2 March 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 271, Larke to Parmelee (copy), 13 March 1900.

<sup>3</sup>P.O., 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Strathcona to Laurier, 23 March 1900.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Strathcona to Laurier, 4 May 1900.

<sup>5</sup>Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania, which had never been interested in the Pacific cable scheme, had granted concessions to the Eastern Extension Company.



There was, however, a distinct possibility that final approval of the contracts for the Pacific cable might have to await approval of the Australian federal government which would have responsibilities for communications under the proposed terms of federation.

The report of the Pacific Cable Committee was sent to the governments concerned in May of 1900. It contained proposed articles of contract for all sections of the cable, specifications for the manufacture and laying of the cable, estimates of the cost of all equipment required for the cable stations, as well as specific recommendations for the locations of the stations.<sup>1</sup> Canada approved the entire report and communicated its willingness to proceed in the project.<sup>2</sup> The enthusiasm in Canada over the apparent success of the scheme was short-lived as word came that Victoria and New South Wales had continued to negotiate with the Eastern Extension Company even though the colonies had approved the recommendations of the Pacific Cable Committee. The Canadian government renewed its protests against the concessions. Laurier informed Chamberlain that Canada "assumes that at least until our views are asked and ascertained no such

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<sup>1</sup>C.O. 885/7, Misc. 128 (*Secret and Confidential*) "Report of the Pacific Cable Committee, 1899-1900," May, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 157, p. 46068, Mulock to Laurier, 30 May 1900; *Ibid.*, vol. 751, p. 215251, Minto to Chamberlain, 31 May 1900.







privileges will be granted."<sup>1</sup>

Canada gained little support from the Colonial Office in the protests. As the Colonial Office carefully explained to Laurier, the Eastern Extension Company had agreed to lay a cable from the Cape to Adelaide without having obtained concessions from Victoria and New South Wales. Thus it appeared to the Colonial officials that the matter ceased to have any relation to the Pacific cable scheme. Chamberlain would continue to recommend against further concessions by Victoria and New South Wales but would not oppose the projected cable or interfere with the terms under which the Cape cable was laid.<sup>2</sup>

Sandford Fleming maintained public interest in the Pacific cable within Canada during this period by issuing periodic public letters on the scheme and working through the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce. In addition, George Denison worked within the British Empire League to promote public interest in the project. Both organizations passed resolutions requesting more rapid progress on the scheme and urging that the Pacific cable be considered only as the first of a series of Empire cables owned and operated by the state.

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<sup>1</sup>P.O., 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Laurier to Strathcona, 19 June 1900. It is apparent that Canada regarded the right to be consulted on related issues as implicit in the cooperative arrangement regarding the Pacific cable. British administrators and the other participating colonies did not always share this view.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, C.O., to Strathcona, 4 July 1890.



Adherents of Fleming's ideas brought up the question in both the Canadian House and Senate and succeeded in having all relevant correspondence printed as a *Sessional Paper*.<sup>1</sup>

An official advertisement calling for firms to submit tenders for the manufacture and laying of 8,272 nautical miles of telegraph cable for the Pacific cable appeared on 14 July 1900. Firms were given a month in which to reply. This provision caused additional annoyance in Canada where *The Globe* asserted that the few firms likely to reply already had tenders prepared. The additional delay would now be compounded by the absence of key people from London during August, the traditional vacation period.<sup>2</sup>

*The Globe's* prediction was accurate, and it was well into October before the financial arrangements and tenders had been decided upon. Chamberlain informed the governments concerned that the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company had submitted the lowest tender. This tender, however, was £300,000 above the estimate made by the consulting engineers due to recent price increases in the materials

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<sup>1</sup>See: *C.S.P.*, 1900, Nos. 55 to 55b, "Correspondence And Documents With Reference To The Pacific Cable," 71 pp.; Fleming Papers, vol. 104, "Canada And British Imperial Cables," British Empire League, 14 March 1900; *Ibid.*, vol. 35, no. 253, Mulock to Fleming, 31 March 1900; *Ibid.*, vol. 37, no. 265, Resolution of the Ottawa Board of Trade, 2 April 1900; Canada, Commons Debates, 1900, pp. 1483, 1752, 1977, 2149; Canada, Senate Debates, 1900, pp. 150, 156, 159, 171.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times* (London), 13 July 1900; and *The Globe* (Toronto), 25 July 1900.



required.<sup>1</sup> Gutta Percha for insulation and steel wire were in particularly short supply due to numerous cables being constructed and laid in many parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain sought and received approval for the additional cost from the colonies before the tender was accepted.

A permanent Pacific Cable Board was set up to sign the contracts for the cable and to handle all future management of the Pacific Cable. Canada was represented on the Board by Lord Strathcona and by Arthur Lang of the Bank of Montreal.<sup>3</sup> The Agents General for the Australian colonies and New Zealand represented the Pacific colonies on the Board. The contract with the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company was signed on 29 November 1900. This company was to manufacture and lay the Pacific cable as well as provide all required support facilities for a total cost of £1,795,000. The cable was to be in operation by 1 January 1903.<sup>4</sup> Clark, Forde and Taylor, Civil and Electrical

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<sup>1</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, p. 215259, Chamberlain to Minto, 27 October 1900; the Treasury had arranged to finance the cable at an interest rate of three per cent.

<sup>2</sup>C.H.C., vol. 22, no. 78, "Memorandum re. Pacific Cable: Tender," 8 August 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 751, p. 215265, Minto to Chamberlain, 15 November 1900. Aberdeen, who had served with Strathcona on the Committee, desired to be replaced since only business details remained for the Pacific Cable Board.

<sup>4</sup>C.O. 885/7, Misc. 125, "Papers Relating To the Proceedings of The Pacific Cable Committee, 1899-1900," February 1901, contains the details of events leading to the signing of the contracts with the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company.





Engineers were engaged by the Pacific Cable Board to supervise the carrying out of the contract. It was planned to use 1901 to select the proper landing sites on Vancouver Island, Fanning Island, Norfolk Island, New Zealand and Queensland. In addition, during that year a nautical survey of the entire cable route would be completed. The cable itself would be laid in sections during 1902.<sup>1</sup> The two decades of struggle for the idea of the Pacific cable as well as the year and a half of negotiations leading to the contracts was ended. An all-British Pacific cable controlled by the governments in Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the Commonwealth of Australia was to become a reality.<sup>2</sup>

The political aspects of the Pacific cable were nearly over by 1901. There remained the passage in Canada of an amendment to the Act of 1900 permitting Canada to financially participate to a slightly increased extent.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 38, no. 273, R. E. Peake (Clarke, Forde, and Taylor) to Fleming, 6 December 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Sandford Fleming had already arranged for George Johnson to prepare a history of the cable project--and Fleming's part in its creation. Fleming Papers, vol. 24, no. 175, Johnson to Fleming, 12 December 1900. Fleming devoted his activities after 1901 to achieving an all-British, state-owned system of cables around the world. He hoped to achieve this through progressive nationalization of existing cables. Despite the tremendous amount of effort put into this crusade by Fleming, other individuals and organizations, it never developed. Many in Canada who helped to create the Pacific cable, where none had existed before, would not whole heartedly support nationalization of other cables. In addition, the Boer War, Queen Victoria's death and costly railway expansion in Canada led to a diminished reception for such Imperial ideas and values.





Similar Acts were passed in Britain and New Zealand during 1901. The Pacific Cable Board, permanently located in London, met regularly to establish the organization and routine necessary to operate an investment of nearly two million pounds. Britain with three members of the board in return for its assumption of five-eighteenths of the cost of the cable, was represented by Sir Spencer Walpole, formerly Secretary to the Post Office, G. E. Y. Gleadowe, of the Treasury and W. H. Mercer of the Colonial Office. The Treasury was responsible for all future British appointments and general supervision of the Board.<sup>1</sup> There were some complications as the federal government in Australia in 1901 assumed control of the Pacific cable. There remained the complications caused by several of the former colonies having agreements with the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. This was compounded by differing rates for telegraph and postal services in the various colonies. The Laurier government initially expressed concern over the possibility that concessions granted prior to federation in Australia by some colonies would be extended to the entire Commonwealth. This possibility, it was believed in Canada might seriously impair the financial prospects of the Pacific cable.<sup>2</sup> In the end, despite some lingering ill feeling on

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<sup>1</sup>*C.S.P.*, 1901, Nos. 59, 59a, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 188, p. 53626, Laurier to Strathcona, 23 February 1901; *Ibid.*, vol. 753, p. 215339, Chamberlain to Minto, 23 February 1901.



the part of the Laurier ministry that the Australians had been far too agreeable to the Eastern Extension Company, the first experiment in cooperation in the provision of inter-colonial communications facilities worked well.<sup>1</sup>

Laurier attempted to take a hand in the arrangements to be made in Canada to send the cable traffic from the Pacific cable across Canada. Laurier, probably for political reasons, wanted all telegraph companies to have equal access to the terminal of the Pacific cable. Walpole, Chairman of the Pacific Cable Board, disagreed entirely with this attitude. As Strathcona informed Laurier, the Pacific Cable Board wanted to establish a truly all-British system which would use only British operators. Walpole also felt that Laurier was interfering in matters which rightfully were up to the Board.<sup>2</sup> He requested an unofficial agreement from Laurier on this point. Laurier agreed to defer the matter of giving American telegraph companies access to the Pacific Cable terminal.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in effect, only the Canadian Pacific Railway was in a position to handle cable traffic from the Pacific cable.

The engineering firm of Clarke, Forde and Taylor during 1901 undertook to provide the information on the ocean floor along the projected cable route as well as select

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 215343, Strathcona to Laurier, 26 February 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Laurier Papers, vol. 752, pp. 215289-294, Strathcona to Laurier, 12 April 1901; Laurier to Strathcona, 22 April 1901.



the exact landing sites for the sections of the Pacific cable. The S. S. *Britannia*, belonging to the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company, was sent to Sydney via the Suez Canal in preparation for the nautical survey. Meanwhile, R. E. Peake, of the consulting firm, inspected potential landing sites on Vancouver Island. On his way Peake visited Ottawa, where he had personal meetings with Lord Minto and Sir Wilfrid Laurier to discuss the steps that should be taken towards selecting a landing place and acquiring a site for the station.<sup>1</sup> Laurier later held a second meeting with Peake and with T. G. Shaughnessy, President of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The result was an agreement under which the C.P.R. would extend its land line from Nanaimo to the cable landing, acquire the land and build the station and cable house--all in accordance with specifications laid down by the Pacific Cable Board. The C.P.R. and the Pacific Cable Board agreed to share the cost in proportion to the accommodation required by each. Laurier personally took part in these arrangements and approved fully.<sup>2</sup>

The selection of the cable landing on Vancouver Island was facilitated measurably by the British Columbia government which offered every assistance to Peake in his

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<sup>1</sup>*C.H.C.*, vol. 27, "Report on Selection of Landing Places, Sites for Stations, etc." by Clarke, Forde and Taylor, 1901, pp. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Peake to Clarke, Forde and Taylor, 18 March 1901, pp. 7-8.



search for a suitable site. British Columbia agreed to make the Pacific Cable Board a free grant of as much government land as required and placed a surveyor at Peake's disposal. Potential sites on the west coast of Vancouver Island were inspected from the Dominion steamship *Quadra*, given to Peake for his use by Laurier. Inspection proved difficult due to the dense undergrowth and massive timber along the coast. Peake sought a location with a good anchorage that was not too rocky or affected by tides. A telegraph line was planned from the site via Port Alberni to Nanaimo where the cable from Vancouver landed. Since no government land was available in desirable locations, a 110 acre site had to be purchased. The price was \$1,500--a high price for uncleared land--but far less than the prices asked by several other owners once it was learned that the land was sought for a cable station. The location selected was near Bamfield Creek. The C.P.R. went ahead with plans to develop the plan for the cable station--soon to be known as Bamfield Station.<sup>1</sup>

Peake was in Queensland by late April, 1901, to locate the Australian landing site for the Pacific cable. A suitable location was quickly found near the town of Southport and the land acquired by the Australian government. J. G. Drake, Postmaster General of Australia, handled all of the details in regard to the organization of the station,

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, "Report on Selection of Landing Places . . . ," pp. 9-17.







Which was to consist of three buildings costing a total of £3,220. Peake ended his report on the Queensland cable station saying:

The Postal Government Officials particularly requested that no Reading room or Billiard Room should be supplied as they considered that these luxuries, unusual in the Colonies would quite demoralize their staff.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning the Pacific Cable operation began to assume the character of a government enterprise.

The selection of a site on Norfolk Island, which had been used in former times as a maximum security penal establishment, proved little more difficult than in Queensland. New South Wales had been granted complete jurisdiction over the island, which was 936 miles east of Brisbane. After an examination of possible sites by the *Britannia*, a suitable location was selected in Anson Bay on the south-west coast. The site was planned to be self-supporting because Peake described the 600 residents of the island as indolent descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers, who had no interest in growing excess produce. The unowned land was acquired and a station plan drawn up.<sup>2</sup>

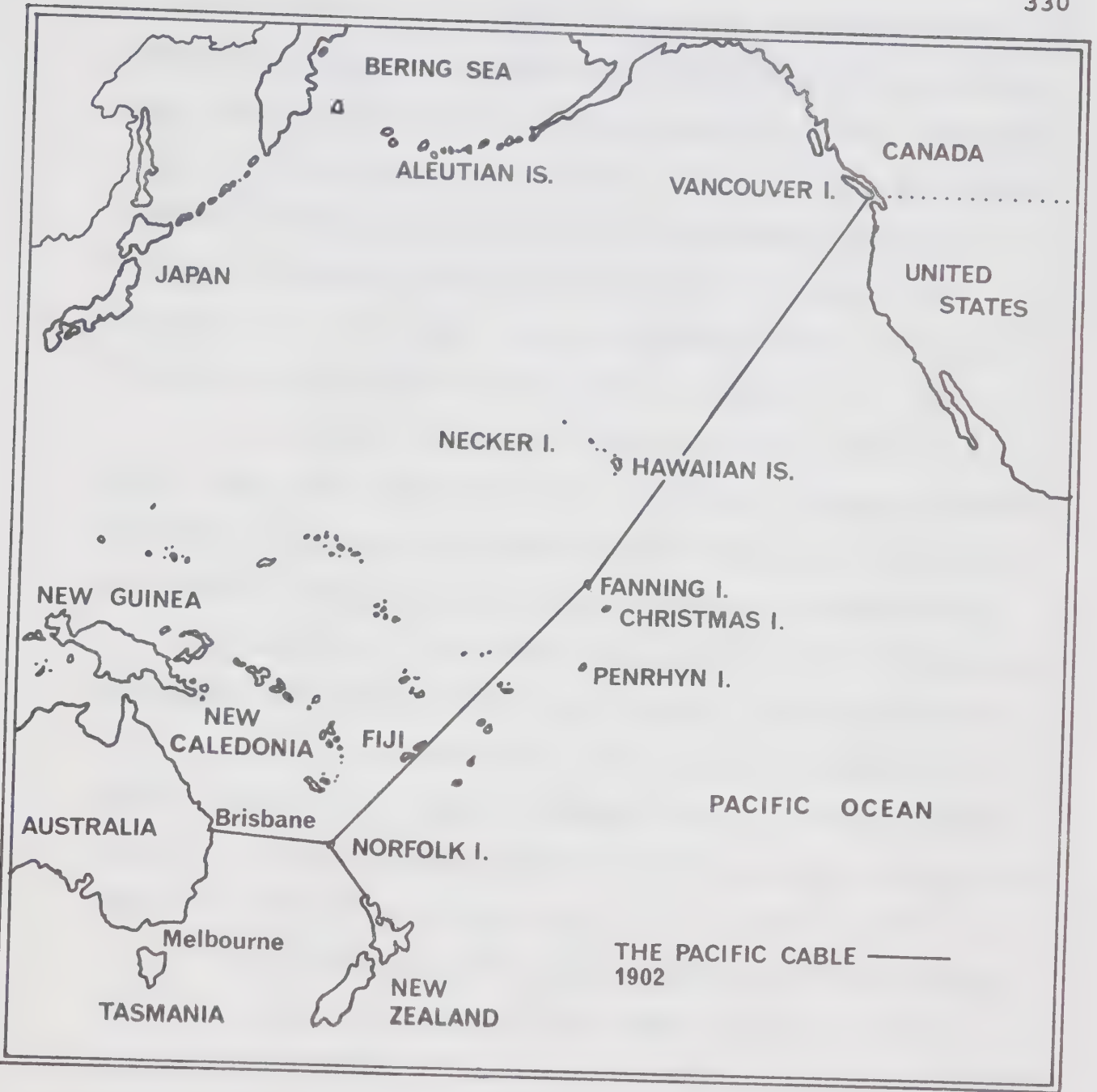
The site selected in New Zealand was at Doubtless Bay, on the north island, 513 miles south-east of Norfolk Island. The facilities were under the supervision of the Commissioner of New Zealand Telegraphs. The sites at Suva

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27-40.







in the Fiji Islands, as well as on Fanning Island, were also under the control of the Fiji government and were selected with little difficulty during the summer of 1901. Fanning Island, 3,653 miles from Vancouver Island, would be the most remote and least self-sufficient of the cable stations. Fanning was nearly barren and populated by only a few people.<sup>1</sup> This was soon to be increased by ten more with the arrival of the Pacific cable staff in 1902.

A survey of the ocean floor along the projected cable route was completed by the *Britannia* during the summer of 1901. No excessively deep sections were encountered and the ocean floor along most of the route was covered with "globigerina ooze." Such deposits formed from the decay of plankton were considered at the turn of the century to provide an ideal bed in which to lay a submarine cable. In such a situation a cable is subject only to damage by earthquake or volcanic action--neither were considered to present much of a hazard along the route of the Pacific cable.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of 1901 everything was in readiness for the final act--the laying of the cable in 1902. Cable stations were under construction at every landing place and a cable house had been constructed at every location. The

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<sup>1</sup>P.O. 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Strathcona to Mulock, 7 April 1902. This report contains a summary of proceedings of the Pacific Cable Board to 6 March 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 118, no. 33, "Report--Surveying and Sounding Expedition," 1901, pp. 38-41.



Pacific Cable Board had established a routine of business and had begun to engage staff for working the cable. C. E. Reynolds, formerly Director General of Telegraphs in India and a man with 31 years experience in the business, was selected as the General Manager of the Pacific Cable. A cable repair ship S. S. *Iris* was being especially built at the Clyde for the Pacific Cable Board and would be stationed in Fiji. The first ship loaded with the southern sections of the Pacific cable left Britain in early January, 1902.<sup>1</sup>

The cable ship *Anglia* began the cable laying operation at Southport, Queensland on 8 March 1902. Cable had been laid by the month's end from Southport to Norfolk Island and on to New Zealand. During April the 981 nautical miles of cable between Norfolk and Suva were laid in spite of mechanical problems and a cyclone. The *Anglia* then returned to England for the 2,430 miles of cable needed to complete the cable to Fanning Island by mid-October.<sup>2</sup>

The immense distance--3,540 nautical miles between Bamfield on Vancouver Island and Fanning Island--which had to be bridged by a single span of cable necessitated using the largest cable ship in the world. This ship the *Colonia*,

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<sup>1</sup>P.O., 10, vol. 19, no. 65162, Strathcona to Mulock, 7 April 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Otto Klotz, "Cable Laying," *The All-Red Line Annals and Aims of the Pacific Cable Project*, ed. Johnson, pp. 393-97.





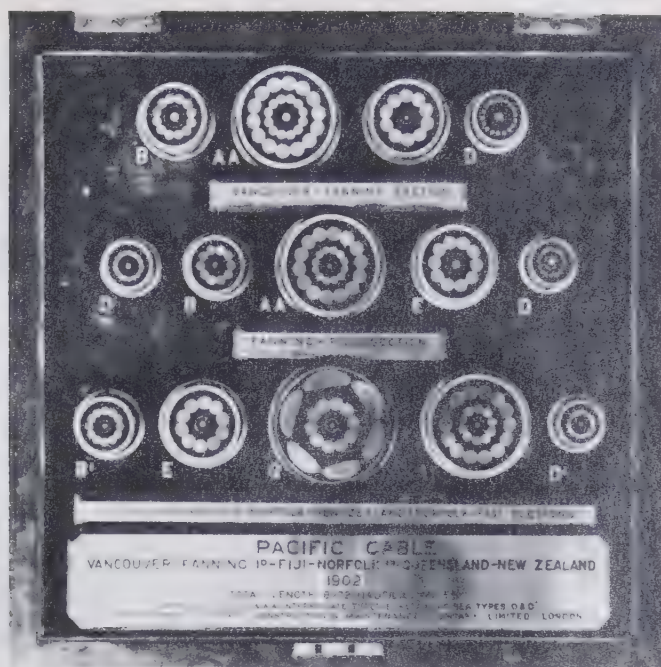


Fig. 2. Display case showing the types of cable used in all sections of the 1902 Pacific cable.  
(Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria)



Fig. 3. A sample of the heavily protected shore end of the 1902 Pacific Cable. This type was used in all landings south of Fiji.  
(Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria)





Fig. 4. The *Anglia*, in Anson Bay, Norfolk Island, landing the shore end of the New Zealand section of the Pacific cable.  
(Public Archives of Canada)



Fig. 5. The *Anglia*, landing the Pacific cable at Doubtless Bay, New Zealand.  
(Public Archives of Canada)







Fig. 6. Cable house and station at Bamfield, Vancouver Island, designed by a C.P.R. architect.  
(Public Archives of Canada)



Fig. 7. Cable landing in progress at Bamfield, Vancouver Island.  
(Public Archives of Canada)



constructed in 1901 for the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company specifically to lay the Pacific cable, was designed to carry nearly 10,000 tons. In terms of cable its 510 foot length could accommodate over 4,000 miles of submarine cable, more than the *Great Eastern* had been able to carry in the 1860's when the Atlantic cable had been laid. The *Colonia* sailed from Bamfield Creek on September 18th and laid the cable to Fanning Island in 18 days at an average speed of eight miles an hour. In every instance the end of the cable was floated ashore by affixing casks to the cable. When the connection was completed on October 31st between Fanning and Suva the Pacific cable was complete.<sup>1</sup>

The Pacific cable was subjected to a thirty-day test period, specified in the contracts, to insure that all equipment functioned properly. Sandford Fleming, who was the recipient of hundreds of congratulatory messages when it was learned the cable had been completed, was among the first to use the cable even though it was not officially open for commercial business. From Ottawa he sent two messages, one east and one west around the world, both addressed to Lord Minto, the Governor General. The message via London took 10 hours and 30 minutes to arrive back in Ottawa while the message via Vancouver took 14 hours and 25 minutes. They were, Fleming claimed, the first messages ever to be sent

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 396-398.





by telegraph around the world.<sup>1</sup> Laurier, Mulock, Chamberlain and many others were also involved in the jubilation among those who worked to bring about an all-British Pacific cable. The tone of the sentiment expressed was that everyone hoped that the cable would be a sign of increased understanding and cooperation among the self-governing units of the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The Pacific cable worked in conjunction with the Canadian Pacific Railway Telegraph which had by-passed the state of Maine and offered unbroken communication to the Atlantic where the Commercial Cable Company carried the messages to Britain. The Pacific cable operated at a rate of three shillings per word. The Australian government and the Pacific Cable Board divided two shillings while the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Commercial Cable divided a shilling for their services. In addition government messages and press material were handled at a reduced rate. The Pacific cable proved to be a technically sound achievement and was capable of handling far more business than it was called upon to deal with in the early years of its existence. The result was to be an annual deficit for the first twelve years of operation.

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming Papers, vol. 34, no. 245, Fleming to Minto, 31 October 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Fleming had earlier expressed the feeling held by those who desired greater unity for the empire, that the spirit of Empire had been successfully raised but there was far too little "practical progress" to show for it. Laurier Papers, vol. 325, pp. 87327-29, "Memorandum," 10 June 1902.



Grand visions of Empire unity and cooperation among the self-governing units of the Empire, which had in part led to the existence of the all-British Pacific cable, soon gave way to charges and counter charges in efforts to explain why governments were required to pay for the annual deficit.<sup>1</sup> Committees would be established and in 1904 a Pacific Cable Conference was called to attempt to rectify the situation, which was caused by a number of factors. The most important was that the Pacific cable never came close to gaining one-half of the total cable revenue from Australia as had been predicted. Part of the reason for this was the attitude of the Australian postal authorities who treated the Pacific cable as a private company even though they had to pay a percentage of the annual deficit.

The Pacific Cable Board operated the cable on principles much like a government department<sup>2</sup> and never sought to compete for business with the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, which very effectively retained most of its former business even though its monopoly had ended. In addition

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<sup>1</sup>The deficit was shared on the same proportional basis under which the cable was established: five-eighteenths each for Britain and Canada, six-eighteenths for Australia and two-eighteenths for New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup>This included putting aside a reserve fund out of yearly revenue great enough to replace the cable in twenty years. This was altered in 1911 but until that time much of the annual deficit consisted of money put into the reserve fund.



the western half of Australia never used the Pacific cable since the rates on the Eastern Extension cables were made competitive. It was ironic that the Pacific cable which had caused the reduction in rates was unable to profit under them.

Other problems which plagued the Pacific Cable Board were the unreliability of the C.P.R. land lines, both across Vancouver Island and through the Rocky Mountains. Interruptions were frequent as winter and spring storms broke the lines and the all-British Pacific Cable frequently found itself using the facilities of American telegraph companies. Another factor which had not been taken into consideration was the rapid growth of the practice of using coded telegraph messages. This saved the sender money by condensing the message into a few words. Messages then consisted of meaningless words or words arranged in an order which had no meaning. The C.P.R. telegraphers, who were extremely low paid and unqualified in comparison to those employed by cable companies, had great difficulty in passing along the messages from the Pacific Cable terminal.

A final difficulty confronting the all-British Pacific Cable was the date at which it was constructed. The years of delay on the project had seen the development of other major cable projects. Early in 1903 the United States was connected to Asia by a cable from San Francisco, which removed much business which it had been hoped would go to a Pacific cable. The Eastern Extension Telegraph Company





completed its cable link between South Africa and Australia in 1902. The competition from these private companies, combined with a general reduction in cable rates brought about through competition, explain the Pacific Cable's failure to show a profit in its early years.<sup>1</sup>

Sandford Fleming's grand conception of a state-owned and state-operated cable system for the Empire never came close to fruition despite Fleming's energetic activity on its behalf once the Pacific cable was assured. A British Inter-Departmental Committee under the chairmanship of Lord Balfour issued a report in 1902 which in essence recommended against further state enterprise in communications.<sup>2</sup> Attitudes changed in the Colonial Office as well, when Joseph Chamberlain in 1903, left the Colonial Office. Public support and interest generated for such questions as inter-colonial communications was less than in the 1890's. The failure of the existing Pacific cable to live up to expectations only made the problem still more difficult. One final innovation which weakened the call for still more state-owned cables was the success in 1902 of G. Marconi's experiments with a wireless telegraph across the Atlantic. The

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<sup>1</sup>A second Pacific cable was laid in 1926. There now exists a telephone cable, laid in 1963 along the same route. Bamfield cable station is now used as a marine research station.

<sup>2</sup>Parl. Pap., 1902, vol. LXV, Cd. 1056, "Report on the Inter-departmental Committee on Cable Communications."





British Empire was soon to be linked with a system of wireless stations which would replace in part the former function of the telegraph cable.

The Pacific Cable, however, remained a tremendous achievement. It forced a reduction in cable rates to Australia and New Zealand. It provided a focus for imperial-minded individuals in their efforts to promote closer imperial relations. It was a positive achievement of imperial sentiment at a time when many other aspects of imperialism were being challenged. It was a successful example of how applied technology could be used to produce social benefits. It was finally, as Sandford Fleming phrased it the "offspring of the Victorian Age."



## CHAPTER IX

### THE BRITISH PACIFIC CABLE--A NINETEENTH CENTURY LEGACY

The all-British Pacific cable was the first instance within the British Empire of cooperation among several of the self-governing colonies in an enterprise in which Great Britain participated equally for the furtherance of commercial, political and social relations. The completion of the construction of the cable in October, 1902, marked the end of over twenty years of nearly continual agitation for the creation of such a communication facility. The prime impulse for the creation of the Pacific cable originated in Canada.

Sandford Fleming, who had participated in the greatest Canadian railway projects, possessed a keen sense of identification with the ideals of British imperialism. So Fleming translated the experiences of successful unification through improved communication in Canada to an Empire context--the problem of communication between Australia, New Zealand and Canada. There was a climate of opinion in Canada among business, political and intellectual leaders which favoured and often promoted the extension of Canadian interests in the Pacific. This interest sharpened as the United States expanded its commercial and political influence into the Pacific. There arose a Canadian desire to cooperate



with Britain, Australia and New Zealand in an effort to forestall American control of communication facilities between North America and these colonies.

Australia and New Zealand, connected to Europe by cable in the 1870's, did not initially enthusiastically favour a cable link to North America. Increased contact with Canadian business and political leaders in the 1880's and 1890's saw interest develop slowly. The attitude of the colonies toward the monopolistic Eastern Extension Telegraph Company which controlled the Australian cables became increasingly unfavourable as the company demonstrated its intention to preserve its exclusive control over the cable system. Canada, New Zealand, and the Australian colonies discovered at Colonial conferences, through limited commercial exchange, and through contacts maintained through organizations with membership in each colony that many attitudes in regard to the development of the British Empire were held in common. A common desire for improved and less expensive cable communication was also expressed. The promotion of the concept of a Pacific cable was made difficult, especially in Australia because of the steadfast opposition of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company which had power and influence in Britain, despite the fact that the company's eastern cables were subject to frequent interruption. Canada remained free of such influence due to the relatively competitive situation in regard to communication links with Great Britain.

Fleming's work created a desire in Canada for a



Pacific cable to join Canada with Australia and New Zealand. In the face of stiff opposition from cable interests at the 1887 Colonial Conference, Fleming promoted the concept of a state owned and operated Pacific cable. This conception was expanded by Fleming in 1898 to include the Pacific cable as merely the first of a chain of state-owned and operated Empire cables. He proposed to create such a system largely through nationalization of existing cables. Public opinion was stimulated in Britain and in the colonies to support creation of such an all-British cable system. The focus was upon a Pacific cable linking Canada with the Pacific colonies as an alternative to the existing privately owned cables and in order to achieve the desired end of lowering the exorbitantly high cable rates between Canada and Australia and New Zealand. It was believed that this would result in greater social interchange between the colonies. Increased use of the postal system following the introduction of lower rates was cited as an example of what might be expected.

Electric telegraphy was the most remarkable development for rapid long distance communication in the nineteenth century. The Victorians saw no limit to the potential good to be derived from progressive adoption of such technological innovations. Men of the age had implicit faith that these innovations held the solution to many of the problems of the time. Many saw the problem of creating a sense of community and common interest within the Empire as fundamental in the





preservation of the values of Anglo-Saxon society. The primary problem in the adoption of such a system was the immense distances separating the British colonies. Internal development within Canada, Australia and New Zealand had shown how effective the telegraph could be in providing a sense of unity and purpose. The Pacific Ocean, the world's largest, remained the final uncrossed barrier between the colonies. Its crossing by telegraph would require the longest cable ever laid--the ultimate test of telegraph technology. Its completion came at a time when the first successful experiments in wireless telegraphy were being carried out. Again Canada was in the forefront of these experiments.

British administrators in the Colonial Office, Admiralty, and Treasury accepted the telegraph and used it as an instrument of administration and defense. In every case such service was provided by private interests heavily subsidized by the government according to the strategic value of the communication link. However, men controlling British finances looked unfavourably at the prospect of government ownership and operation of intercolonial communication facilities.

It took prolonged and persistent colonial agitation to induce the Colonial Office even under Chamberlain, a most enthusiastic imperialist, to accept finally in 1899



cooperative involvement and financial responsibility in a government owned Pacific cable. The decision was made not merely for commercial or strategic reasons but because the colonies demanded cooperation in the project. The colonies refused to support the terms for a Cape to Adelaide cable favoured by the military and private telegraph interests. Although economic motives for imperial expansion and consolidation were undoubtedly important and have been given much emphasis in Empire history--sentiment for Empire unity, supported by leading colonial political figures and backed by public opinion led to a Pacific cable. In a period that rejected nearly every scheme for political and economic unification of the Empire the Pacific cable was established. It was the result of sentiment and the latest in nineteenth century technology.

Improved communications were sought to provide the Empire with ties--not political or legal--but instead facilities through which the isolated colonies could gain an increased understanding of their common problems. The fact that such a link, through administrative problems, initially proved less successful than its proponents had hoped does not diminish the importance of their creation.

Increased facility to communicate does not necessarily lead to better understanding as proponents of a Pacific cable had hoped. The common basis for understanding must



already exist--the sense of belonging to the British Empire provided such a sense in the late nineteenth century. Participation in the Empire for the self-governing colonies provided a measure of protection from private exploitation and international rivalry at a time when their future would have been in doubt. The Pacific cable was conceived by men of the nineteenth century to serve the men of the twentieth. It was an attempt to provide a legacy to insure the preservation of their values and ideals.



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